

Wilton Bowling Club (Inc)

A brief history



Early in 1949, Mr. E C Marris, who lived in Wilton Road, learnt that another resident of the Wilton Road area, Mrs. Curtis, was interested in making an area of land available for outdoor bowls. He conducted a survey of the Wilton and Wadestown suburbs to see if there was any interest in such a venture.

With assurances of support for such a proposal from residents, and with the help of members of the Wilton Bush Residents' Association, Mr. Marris arranged a meeting for 15-June-1949 at the Wadestown Side School to consider various options. About 50 attended. Among the options was that the Wellington City Council would purchase the land and lease it back to an approved bowling club. The council had also given an undertaking that heavy earthworks involved in creating a bowling green would be carried out by its Reserves Department.

At the meeting The WCC Director of Parks and Reserves for the Wellington City Council, Mr. Hutt, presented a proposal for the purchase of land by the city council. He also outlined the preliminary earthworks that would need to be carried out. The meeting resolved to form a bowling club for the Wilton–Wadestown districts, to be named the Wilton Bowling Club. Provisional officers elected included Mr. Marris as President and Mr. P Hansard as Secretary. A general meeting of members and intending members of the new club was called for 17 August, 1949, which approved a draft constitution; confirmed appointment of the provisional officers elected at the June meeting; and resolved to issue a non-interest-bearing debenture of £5 [five pounds] to all foundation members, to be repayable five years after the date of issue.

It was reported to the first AGM of the club, for the year ending 31May 1950, that more than 6,000 yards of soil and rock had been removed by the city council, but that the formation of the green had been carried out by members. The green was opened for play on 17 February 1951, by Mr. C M Bowden, MP, and closed on 31 March to allow further work to be carried out. The green was opened for the start of the 1951/52 season on 27 October 1951, and on 14 May 1952, the committee held its first meeting in the newly-erected club pavilion - an 800 square-foot structure at ground level, with a locker room and conveniences in the basement. An initial quote of £3,000 for constructing the pavilion had been rejected by the executive and an arrangement was finally made with Mr. F P Scahill, of the Lower Hutt building firm Scahill and Sparks, to do the work on a cost-plus contract based on an hourly rate, with members assisting with working bees at weekends. The building was finally erected at a cost of just under £2,500 with the president reporting to the AGM on 25 June 1952, that the working bees had been doing 'useful work' completing interior work and amenities.

There were many long hours and 'useful work' undertaken and necessary in these early days. By June 1956, membership of the men's club had grown to 114, including 90 full-playing members. Membership of the women's club, which had been formed in 1951, stood at 75. It was reported to the AGM in 1955 that the club's second green would be ready for play by the start of the 1955/56 season.

There have been numerous developments and changes over the 59 years of life at Wilton Bowling Club. Some of the highlights have been:

- A special meeting of the club was held on March 29, 1963, at which it was resolved that the Wilton Women's Bowling Club be constituted as the Women's Section of the Wilton Bowling Club (Inc). This was reflected in a new constitution adopted by the club for the 1964/65 season.

- The 1963 special meeting was also informed that the practical possibilities of running a three-green concern were insurmountable from a financial point of view, but that the club should maintain its forward-looking role by continuing to plan for the opening of a third green as soon as possible.
- In April 1989, following a submission by the club, the Wellington City Council agreed to re-classify part of the Otari Air Native Plant Museum from Scenic Reserve to Recreation Reserve, clearing the way for development of the third green. The time taken to agree on the reclassification coincided with the introduction of 'artificial' playing surfaces for lawn bowls. The club looked at the possibility of having the third green as an artificial surface, rather than turf. This was finally agreed and Wilton became the first club in Wellington to open an artificial green, provided by Henselite, in 1991.
- In 1995 there was a major extension to the club's pavilion with costs met from reserves and debentures taken out by members.
- In 1999 a new constitution was agreed at the AGM and brought men's and women's memberships together as an amalgamated club. It also introduced a progressive and modern administrative structure, replacing the unwieldy committee of up to 20 with a board of management of eight.
- During 2005 - 2006, Wilton endeavoured to build an indoor green with financial assistance from the Thorndon Bowling Club (in recess - having sold their property several years earlier). However, the club decided not to proceed with a resource consent application due to issues raised in an environmental impact report commissioned independently by the city council.
- In 2009 planning is underway to redevelop the three green layout – once again, with financial assistance from the Thorndon Bowling Club. The original artificial green, developed in 1991, has had little use for a number of years as the surface was not good and not up to modern standards. The redevelopment plan will:
 - Replace the No1 Cotula green (directly outside the club rooms) with a modern all weather artificial surface for year round use.
 - Extend the No 2 Cotula green size from 33.5m to 36.6m required for national & international competition play.
 - Redevelop the No 3 artificial green as a new Cotula green.

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