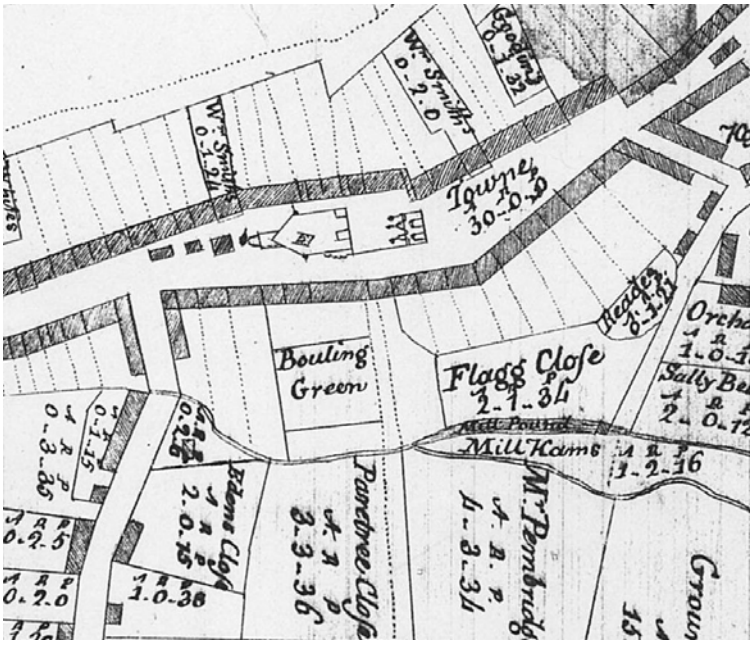
Chipping Campden Bowling Club Centenary

Gary Robinson

A map of Campden dated July 1722, which was the result of a survey of the Manor of Campden for Dorothy, Countess of Gainsborough, shows quite clearly a 'Bouling Green' near the Town Hall behind the High Street and adjacent to 'Paretree Close'. This bowling green existed behind the Noel Arms until about 1989 when it was sold for development. Gary Robinson, Deputy Chairman of the Chipping Campden Bowling Club has extracted some interesting facts from the Minutes Book over the 100 years since 1910, the year when the current club was formed.

Given the popularity of the bowls sport in Tudor times (Francis Drake, Henry VIII and mentions in Shakespeare, etc.) it is highly probable that the Campden estate had at least one bowling green when old Campden House was built. Bowls had been played informally up and down the country for centuries; around the turn of the twentieth century (following football and cricket) clubs were formed, national associations set up and rules written down and harmonized. Cricketer W.G.Grace was the first president of the English Bowling Association in 1903 and was also involved in the Gloucestershire Bowling Association. One of the other reasons that clubs started to form at the turn of the century was that travelling to play other clubs became more feasible.



The Campden club was formed on 27th May 1910 at a meeting at the Noel Arms, Chipping Campden. Present at that meeting were G.Haines (George, the farmer who later went to Canada), R.Haydon (Ron, the chemist), A.Tanner (Alfred, The Noel Arms Landlord), P.Dewey (Percy, the Schoolmaster), G.Phillipson, P.Prout (*Percy, the shopkeeper),* D.Haydon (Dudley, the dairy farmer), H.Ellis (Harry, the basket maker) and J.Bailey (Jack, the Guild of Handicraft Silversmith).

G. Haines chaired the meeting and the name decided upon was Campden Bowling Club (no Chipping) and subscriptions for the first year were set at 3/6. There was no mention of laying a green or setting aside land for this, therefore one concludes that the green had been there for some time before the club was formed. A Handicap competition was also introduced on June 25 as a '21 up' competition.

In this first year E.Roberts, C.Shepherd, S.Locke and G.Coldicott also joined the club and the first fixtures were with Blockley and Shipston bowling clubs, with Stow (who no longer have a green) and Moreton-in-Marsh subsequently added. A green-keeper was employed to look after the green.

In 1911 a cup was presented as a prize for the handicap competition. This later became known as the Club cup – see below. Names of early winners are inscribed on the studs and the band along the base.

The minutes mention tension arising with the Cricket Club over the price that they were asking the bowling club to pay for the hire of a roller and there appear to have been problems with the green and the green-keeper was replaced. There were discussions in 1912 over the rules for play and in particular whether it was acceptable to play anywhere on the green (like crown green of today) or whether the club should migrate to the rink system (that is playing up and down one lane or rink on the green and centring the jack, as with lawn bowls). The 1913 season had to be extended in order to complete the club competitions and by 1914 the club was becoming more professional with the purchase of measures, mats and lockers. Any current green-keeper will be deeply disturbed to learn that in 1915 sheep were put onto the green to get the grass down and that five years later in 1920 a dance was held on the green to raise money for the improvements to the green and club.



This photograph of the green at the back of the Noel Arms is from the CADHAS Jesse Taylor glass plate collection taken at about this time. In 1922 the club entered the Moreton and District League, although it only joined the Gloucestershire Bowling Association in 1935. In 1936 the club's difficulties with premises started when a request for a formal tenancy for the green was declined by the Noel Arms proprietor. The green was lengthened by two yards in 1937 and W.H.Warmington (Silversmith) was selected to play for the county in 1939. During the Second World War, a fundraising tournament was held in 1943 to support the Red Cross and the St John's fund and also a dance for the war effort. In this period the secretary tabled a motion that ladies should be allowed to practice on the green. There was much disgust and the resolution was aggressively rejected. The secretary resigned in disgust. Another dance was held in 1944, this time for "Salute the Soldier".



In 1945 Mr *[Tommy]* Knott celebrated 25 years as captain by deciding to donate a trophy to the club (the Knott Vase - see over. On close up the silver mark shows that it was made by W.H.Warmington. The inscription reads: 'The Knott Challenge Cup To Mark his 25th Year as Captain, 1922-1926' with the winner's name of each year around the base. It was decided that rubber shoes only would be worn on the green

and there is the first recorded mention of a ladies club being in existence. F.Collett was selected to play for the county. A Ladies Green is mentioned in 1947 and there was consideration given to widening the green to make 4 rinks. However, by 1957 membership numbers were down to 18 and an amalgamation with the ladies club was discussed, but rejected. Again two years later there was further discussion regarding joining with the ladies club and using their green (in the recreation ground we think).



The Golden Jubilee in 1960 was celebrated through a joint ladies and mens match with representatives invited from other local clubs. This was followed by a supper and a cake presented to the club by the ladies club. Rather patronisingly it is reported that the ladies gave "a very creditable account of themselves" during the game. The shelter at the green was re-thatched.

In 1962 Henry Hart was selected to play for the county and the old mower was sold to the ladies club, who then had to pay a fortune for it to be repaired! An extra rink was built in 1963 and a club tie was introduced in 1965. Once again a tenancy was requested and denied in 1970, and discussions were held with the Cricket Club regarding a joint project, but the cricket club was nearing the conclusion of its own arrangements. Then in 1972 Mr Sargant, the landlord at Noel Arms, indicated that he wished to build on the green in 1973. The 'Watchhorn Cup' was donated in memory of Reg Watchhorn in 1974. This was played for as a mixed triples. In 1975 J.Benfield reached the Worcestershire county singles final and qualified to play in the national finals at Worthing. The Knott vase was changed to a pairs competition.

In 1979 the green failed the county inspection making it ineligible for use in county competitions and in 1980 the club withdrew its membership from Gloucestershire Bowling Association and Saturday afternoon matches were dropped. Monday nights became practice night in 1981. In 1983 the pavilion roof blew off in a storm. In 1985 there was a proposal from the Cricket Club to lay a new green on their land, but it was dismissed due to lack of space. In 1988 it was reported that the Noel Arms had been sold and new owners would move in December. A letter was received stating that the green would be unavailable from the 1989 season onwards and so the search for an alternative site was started in earnest.

Having lost its home, the club discovered an old disused green behind the then Victoria Arms in Bretforton. This was intended to be a temporary location, whilst the club and the local authority sought alternatives back in Campden. This new green could not be watered or tended properly, despite the efforts of long time green keeper Frank Leadbeater and was described as 'sporting' by visitors within ear shot. However the green proved to be a home for longer than was expected and in 2000 the club received notification that this pub also was to be developed. The club then played two seasons of away-only matches. In this period and despite its absence from Campden, new members had continued to join the club replacing those ill or deceased, the club's relaxed nature and lively banter being appreciated. Fundraising efforts were initially started under the leadership of David Feasey and then Peter Gardener, including the famous pig roasts at the December Victorian Evenings in Campden. By the time that two proper competing proposals emerged for Station Road, the club had raised over £60,000 by itself. When Dick Smith's proposal won

the day, the club obtained a further grant of £25,000 from Cotswold District Council and finally in 2002 the £100,000 project of getting the green built up from a disused reservoir was attained with the help of voluntary labour from club members and friends. It was desperately sad to lose Roger Bragg and John Wadey, who were comparatively young and who had played important roles in the club, before the green was properly open.

Further major loans and grants were obtained from Bowls England, the National Lottery and the Foundation for the Sports and Arts to help build the beautiful clubhouse. Even then the building would not have got underway or been completed without the skills and financial backing of Clive Bennett, who also became Chairman, and his building firm. 2009 saw more improvements and fundraising to the inside of the building to make room for a longer indoor mat.



The club is now celebrating its centenary year. President Frank Leadbeater has been at the club for 50 years and the family of Chairman David Hart has been involved for most of the 100 years. This year the Club will welcome teams from Bowls England, Barbarians, the Friends of Bowls England and the Gloucestershire County President. Half of the current membership of sixty has joined the club since the new green was laid and the aim is to reach one hundred members, with players of all levels and a growing fixture list of friendly and competitive games.

Did Abraham Lincoln Know Of The Campden Wonder?

Jill Wilson

This note coincides with the recent publication of Jill Wilson's account of the Campden Wonder 'Mr Harrison is missing', available from CADHAS Archive Room.

In the Chipping Campden Public Library crime fiction section is a copy of a book temptingly entitled *100 Dastardly Little Detective Stories*.[i] All are well worth reading but I found 'The Trailor Murder Mystery,' by Abraham Lincoln[ii], first published in 1843, of especial interest. Briefly the story tells of three brothers named Trailor who in 1841 lived a few miles apart in the state of Illinois[iii]. One brother, William, and an acquaintance named Fisher, who had the reputation of being a miser, went to visit Archibald Trailor who lived in Springfield. On the way they were joined by the third brother, Henry. In Springfield they lodged with Archibald's business partner, a man named Myers. One night after dinner Fisher was missing and searches for him that night and in the following days were unsuccessful. After a few days William set off back home in his buggy, Henry accompanying him en route as far as his own home.