

## THE HISTORY OF OUR LADY AND ST. GERARD'S BOWLING CLUB

Bob Richardson's article in the January 1992 issue of News & Views stirred many memories of the Bowling and Bowlers of this Grand Club, so I thought I would try and give some small account of it's history, also for those of you now present, and in the many many years to come, who just turn up with "Their Bowls in their Bags in their Hands" Please spare a thought for those who have gone before and prepared the ground for your enjoyment.

Let me tell you how the Bowling Club started. Yes, and from this as well grew our Parochial Centre as it is today. Sixty years ago when I first came to Lostock Hall the Turner Memorial Hall was used for Dances, Whist Drives, Guild Tea Parties and as a Men's Club with just soft drinks, but with 2 full sized Billiards Tables.

The Hall itself was built with voluntary Labour, but supervised by a local Builder - This in the early 1900's as a place to raise Funds to build our present Church. In the 1930's, the Men's Club was closed down, so the men's togetherness only came about after the Second World War, that is the late 40's and early 50's.

George Dawson and John Redmond ran a Saturday night Cinema. Shades of a Dramatic Society. The demise of Whist Drives and Bingo was born. What a success and what a money-spinner. The Classrooms appeared and a School Kitchen as the Parish grew.

Suddenly the Men's Guild came to life. Whilst they were always faithful in their service to the Blessed Sacrament, we were now meeting to work for the Parish, as our forefathers had done before. The extension to the Church was needed, as was a new School. Sweepstakes, Raffles and Jumble Sales were organised. Bingo was making a substantial contribution to Parish funds.

But you know the old saying - "All work and no play makes Jack a Dull Boy" - But we had no Dull Boys in the B.S.G. so once a month during the Winter we got ourselves invited to practically all the Catholic Clubs in an area from Longridge to Coppull and Chorley. We always had a fair number of non-Parishioners and non-Catholic friends with us. These were great nights, especially as the Hall was still used as a School.

From these Games Nights the idea of a Bowling Trip was raised. Bill Cornwell organised the green, the tea and evening entertainment. Les Darby saw to the bus and bought the prizes (at cost). Frank Rogerson paired off the Bowlers and organised the Competitions, he saw everyone got their share of Bowling and Bill and Les saw to the Lubrication. We visited St. Bede's at Clayton Green, where we were always most welcome. Then Knott End, the Golden Ball, Pilling, and one of our favourite spots, The Royal at Burton in Kendal. Then we always finished up at St. Mary's, Fleetwood (Alf Cook buying all the pies at the Labour Club up the road), or at Blackpool Catholic Club, Talbot Road. Fr. Forbes used to join us for the last hour, He would wander round with a gill in his hand and have a word with each and every one of us - May he rest in Peace.

These Bowling trips whetted our appetite for more serious Bowling. In October 1972 the Blessed Sacrament Guild had a long meeting, one of the items discussed was could we have a regular Bowling Team? So a list was started for those interested, by December we had 20 names. In January a meeting was called for those interested. We agreed to join a League. This was difficult; no one seemed to want to know us. The Town greens in Preston were too far away and too expensive. Then Dick Bamber at the Conservative Club heard of our plight. "No trouble" he said. For some years we had supplied tables and extra cutlery for their President's Day. They returned the compliment. We were to use the Green for Home games on Tuesday nights. Best of all, free of charge.

Next a League. We were accepted into the 9th Division of the Preston and District Amateur Bowling League - there were only 9 Divisions then - so a Committee was formed. Frank Rogerson, Chairman, Gerald Flaherty, Secretary, Jack Clisham, Treasurer, Bill Smith, Captain, Stan Flanagan, Vice-Captain and League Delegate, Eric Topping, Selection Committee Member.

Next Item, Financial Commitments (1) League Subscriptions? and 6 Match Blocks. These bought from Willie Cunningham who at that time had a Sports Shop in Church Street. Willie was great, a true Sportsman. When he knew we were just starting and were strapped for cash he let us have these Jacks at cost price, he also said he had got them before Purchase Tax came in so we didn't have to pay that. Thanks Willie Cunningham

To cover this outlay we decided straight away we would pay IOp per week each and no perhaps. So now we were off. Our League programme started just after Easter 1973. We finished the Season 4th out of 10 teams. We called on 17 players but 3 of these only had one game each, the other 3 whilst Bowlers in the past said they would be more than happy and support us. John Lee gave us a Cup and Johnny Flanagan was the first winner. The next Trophy was donated by Eric Topping. This we played for in a World Cup type Competition to try and give everyone more than one game. Also whilst at the Conservative Club, Mary Craven donated a Shield to be played as a Doubles Competition in memory of their Tom. A great character who joined the men of the Parish in all they're fun and games. Mary continued to watch our progress and was never happier than when making surreptitious donations.

In January 1974 we suffered our first sad loss. George Dawson died. This was a sad loss to both Club and Parish. In April John Schultz died. John was another great Parish worker and member of the Bowling Club. Both George and John were great examples of the very best of Our Lady and St. Gerard's. May they rest in peace.

For 10 years 1973-1982 we enjoyed great success, rising to the 6th Division of the League, but bowling was becoming more popular at the Con. Club: More people were using the Green. Veteran's teams were starting, as was the Ladies. So towards the end-of-the 70's we realised we might need a new home. Besides which our Team was creating more interest.

Back to the Blessed Sacrament Guild. Alf Cook said, "What about Father Forbes Garden. Alf made all sorts of enquiries regarding size of greens etc. It was decided it was possible and Father said "If you can do it, go ahead!" Looking back, we must have been Crackers. The amount of work we had to do was unbelievable. See Quotes.

QUOTE FROM BOWLING CLUB REPORT: -

"The reason we called this meeting was in view of the suggestion raised at the Blessed Sacrament Guild meeting that maybe we could eventually have our own Bowling Green. Needless to say this project has the member's wholehearted support. There will be quite a lot of work to do in preparation, especially behind the Grotto, which is both dangerous, and in a bad state; children are playing on and around it. Watch the weekly sheet when we ask for volunteers."

DECEMBER 1980 - BOWLING GREEN: QUOTE FROM: -

"Men of the Bowling Section - Where have you been? With just a small amount of help from each of you our hopes to get planning permission this side of Christmas might have been achieved. Since the time that a suggestion was put forward that we build a Bowling Green at the rear of the Church and presbytery, i.e. early October, about 100 hours labour have been

put into this project - some 600 barrow loads of soil have been moved from the rear of the Grotto and in addition several tons of rock. All this work has been done by 2 senior citizens, 5 younger men and two teenage parishioners."

JANUARY 1981 - BOWLING CLUB: QUOTE FROM; -

"In this year of 1981 we shall need the help of some of the men of the Parish to prepare the ground for the Bowling Green. The progress made has been really good and those who have worked have done a first class job, for which we are grateful. We have got to the stage where we should be making definite plans and trying to produce a timetable. As soon as we can do this we shall publish the information in the News and Views or the weekly sheet.

Then we would like your physical help. The other help we shall need will be financial, but we do intend to try and give value for money. We did make a start on December 16th - we held a Whist Drive. Whilst we did not make much profit we did have a good start. The help we had from Bowling Club members was grand - and those who bought tickets. Thank you very much. Also thanks to all that helped and came. One source of encouragement for our project was a donation of £25. This will start our Bank Account. We thank the giver and know it will be a real start to something which will enhance the whole of our Church surround."

FEBRUARY 1981 - BOWLING GREEN PROJECT: -

"We would like to thank Fr. Forbes for his support and encouragement in this scheme. Whilst we hope to make a Bowling Green which will be used by any parishioner, Fr. Forbes has wider plans for this piece of ground. He hopes that it will be used by all parishioners as a beautiful garden, not as it was becoming, a wilderness, especially behind the Grotto which was quite a dangerous area for children.

About 10 men, young and old have worked extremely hard during the past two months. They have done a mountain of work. We are glad to see 3 under 20-year-olds helping. Let's not forget that the present Youth of the Parish will reap the most benefit. We would like to thank the two people who have given donations. One of £25 and one of £10 which has swelled our funds to £52.00. The Bowling Club are committed to organising Fund Raising efforts In February we plan to have a Whist Drive on Tuesday, 3rd. Then on Friday 20th February we hope to have an Old Time Dance run by Wilt Seddon.

We would be most grateful if any other Parish organisations would like to do something to swell our Funds. All money received will be faithfully accounted for. All expenditure properly recorded and an up to date financial statement will be reported each month. Besides which we shall need helpers to dig trenches for drains, help to level the ground, make surrounds and fences and plan and plant shrubs and flowers. Finally this garden will be for your benefit, so we would like you to take an interest. As the weather gets better come and see what is happening."

Finances were a problem. So we did all sorts of things. We sold roast potatoes in the Centre - roasted in the bonfires of rubbish. We sold Holly, held Whist and Domino Drives. There were Raffles outside Church, we ran sweepstakes. Then there was the great generosity of those people who gave us donations. Raffles were held at Wednesday night Bingo 6.

MARCH 1981 - BOWLING GREEN PROJECT:

"During the past month we have had 3 more donations. We held a Whist and Domino Drive (To be repeated on Tuesday, 10th March), and we have done a thriving trade selling

potatoes, roasted in our clearing up bonfires, in the Centre on three Friday nights. So now we have £107 in hand, with our expenses to date being £5.80. Progress?

The area of Father's garden is now virtually clear. The hedges have been cut and laid, rubbish and unnecessary growth cleared and burnt. We now are now ready to submit plans to the Council, applying for permission to change the use of the garden; we are also ready to make detailed plans of what has to be done and the order of doing this. We shall also see what we need and be able to estimate costs. To this purpose we have formed a Working Committee who will be responsible to Fr. Forbes. This Committee is - Alf Cook, Frank Alston, Frank Rogerson, Jim Slater and Peter Watson.

There is also a willing band of workers, who have really worked wonders (and that without the stimulation of D.D.) Fr. Forbes and those of us who started this really do appreciate their willing help. Thanks are due to all who express their interest, those who have donated - those who have given prizes for the whist and Domino Drives - those who have turned up to help and play - also not least the people who pass by and look and say 'It's coming on, Good luck'."

At this time, we must make mention of Eileen Watson. Before he died, Bernard Watson said that if there was anything he could do we had only to ask. Well, Eileen honoured this commitment, but we didn't need to ask her, with Peter Watson as operator, we had the use of a J.C.B. at no cost. This was invaluable.

All through the first 6 months of 1981 we worked continuously. The back of the Grotto was strengthened and a strong stone wall was built. Ray Cartwright was our main Stonemason. The bowling area was leveled and a retaining wall was built. This was necessary as the garden sloped at least 6ft from the Presbytery to School Field. By June we had Council permission to change the use of the area from Garden to Bowling Green.

From now on we started to build a Crown Green Bowling Green. Nobody knew exactly what to do. We read books, and in Peter Watson we had an expert on draining and ground leveling - two of the most important aspects of the work, especially as this was to be a Crown Green whose centre was 9 inches higher than all the edges.

We laid a herring bone drainage system. This took 70 tons of pea stone, plus many tons of concrete and rubble that came from round-the Grotto and an old Greenhouse foundation. Once the drains were filled in and the ground levelled with a Crown we laid 180 tons of 2 to 3 inch stone. This was the foundation for the Top Soil. We used 380 tons of Topsoil, which came from the Carrot Fields in the Rufford Area. This was when we had to turn to Father for some money. Without hesitation he lent us £ 1,000).

Whilst doing all this we were constantly raising money. People were so generous. Eileen Watson especially, who paid some of our bills to save V.A.T., and then forgot to charge us. But I think the Bowling Green Project by now was everyone's Project. We kept people informed through News and Views. Father let us have Raffles outside Church. Everyone supported us. So many gave till it hurt - from £1 to £100.

Father was delighted at our progress. He was even looking forward to having a Bowl House with toilets and tea making facilities, because he envisaged the area as an amenity for the whole Parish. A place to sit and relax. Earthly paradise not just for Bowlers.

Then right at the end of September, we turned to the only real expert Tradesman, Eddie Cross from Stoney Lane, who came and seeded the Bowling Area. When we came to pay him, he said "You've done a grand job, have this on me". But there was still a great deal to

do - Paths to be laid Seats to be made – A good substantial wall and fence to be built at the Cemetery End of the Green. Dunstan Watson made and erected this very strong and attractive fence. There were Shrubs to be pruned, flowers to be planted. Hedges needed strengthening with new plants.

16th April 1982 - A Day to remember. The first mowing of the Green. It yielded 4 Barrow loads of cuttings. We had an old Mowing Machine given to us, but even after having it repaired it wasn't a success so Father Forbes said, "Do the job properly, this we did. The machine cost us just over £800 and is still going strong

During the clearing up operations we uncovered another niche in the Grotto, for this we were given a most beautiful marble statue of St Joseph with the Infant Jesus. For this marvellous gift we are indebted to Sister Mary McLaughlin, S.H.C.J., Convent of the Holy Child Jesus. The statue was originally in Winckley Square Convent. This is really very fitting it preserves a link with Winckley Square Convent, where so many girls from Our Lady and Saint Gerard's Parish received their Grammar School Education.

At this time we received one other outside Gift, well not a gift, but a grant of £20 from South Ribble Borough Council. We had applied to the Sports Council and to an Incentive Scheme run by Whitbread Breweries with no response.

In January '83 a Parish Meeting accepted 10 Rules already formulated by Fr. Forbes with the members of the Blessed Sacrament Guild. One query was raised regarding Rule 6, which reads "Full members only shall have the right to vote at General Meetings". It was explained that as the Bowling Green is on Parish Land just as any other part, Church, Cemetery and Parochial Centre, then it must come under the jurisdiction of the Parish, with Ladies having full rights.

February 1983. We were in the process of buying a suitable building for a Bowl House. Planning permission would of course be necessary. This we received in May. A friend of Cliff Hughes drew up the plans for free (Many thanks), but the Council charged us £44. In March we bought a building, it was at Courtaulds, and cost us £100. That was the easy part. We had to dismantle it, transport it and re-erect it. What a job that was, with one or two very hairy moments, but we had a great band of helpers. We even got it transported for free. Thanks to the Contractor from Longridge and the good offices of Cliff Hughes.

It was such a good proposition that the job had to be done right. This was necessary to obtain planning permission. A suitable base was the first item - with water and drains. This was a job for the Professionals and we were nearly out of money. This work was not completed until the end of 1983.

At the end of February or beginning of March we received a visit from an expert from Myerscough Hall Horticultural College. He inspected the Green and said it was alright. He advised us on further treatment and said, "get playing".

Easter Sunday, 3rd April 1983. The day we had been looking forward to and working for, all these past 28 months broke grey and damp. After a week of terrible rain. We only managed to mow the green on Saturday afternoon. By lunch time on Sunday it looked as if it would be fit for some play by 3 p.m. Father Forbes dashed from Baptising an Infant. Thereby opening up a new life for this child. To throwing the first wood to open up a new life for our Bowling Club. May both of them enjoy three score and ten years of giving pleasure to people.

Bill Hall, the Preston and District League Secretary came to see us start. Thanks Bill. Leyland Guardian and Evening Post sent photographers. Thanks to them. Several of our

Parishioners were also clicking merrily away. So we should have a pretty comprehensive record of the events.

After Father Forbes had a couple of ends, pride of place and privilege of playing the first competitive game was accorded to Frank Rogerson and Alf Cook. (Who have been faithful to this project from its conception). Joining them to make up the first four were Arthur Bateson (representing the oldest worker) and Keith Topping (The youngest helper) They both have done more than their share of very hard work. Then all who wished were made into fours and they enjoyed a game of seven up. Whilst the green was heavy and the grass had been deliberately left long it was possible to feel you were really playing bowls. League bowling started the following week.

1st August 1983 - Father Forbes who had been ill - died suddenly. Father, had been ill and in hospital, but this was a sad shock to the whole of the Parish.

In the Evening of the 2nd August 1983, Father Theodore Young was speaking of Father Forbes. He said "We should think of this being the start of a wonderful life for Father", but we have much sorrow to have lost from our lives one who gave us such encouragement in the many projects the Parish organisations undertook. Fr. Young said that Fr. Forbes would wish us to continue all these activities as though he were still with us.

Sunday, 4th September 1983, was Father Forbes Trophy Final. This was to be such a special day, with a very special Trophy named after a very Special Man. The Father Forbes Trophy is part of the garden, yes if you like a part of the Parish. The wood represents the trees of the Garden. The Bowl given by Norman Dawson a Parishioner. This was polished by Jack Catterall our Organist. The basic design by Alf Cook and Frank Alston. The whole put together by Mr. Eccles of the Craft Department of All Hallows. Although we since have a President's Prize, whilst there will be other Presidents, there is only one Fr. Forbes. So the hope is that the Bowlers make the Fr. Forbes Trophy Competition a real special effort and a day of remembrance. Our first Winner was David Coupe, who played for the team from the beginning.

This was the end of our first season. A season, which started with such Joy and Hope, yet ended with so much sadness as well. New friends made and a new way to enjoy our leisure moments. This was expressed so well by Frances Kitchen who wrote in News and Views October 1983.

"Happy memories of one aspect of the past few months."

A bleak windy Sunday afternoon - the opening of the Bowling Green. Father Forbes rolling the first wood - photographs -slides - "it'll be a tricky green this, by gum it will. Oh give it time, it'll settle down".

Another cold day, Spring Bank I think, ventured on to the green, lots of advice from Joe, Alf and Bill, concentration on Maureen's face. I couldn't keep hold of the 'wood', managed at last to 'throw' it at least six yards. Revised my opinions of bowling and how glad now that I did.

Those early days when more ladies came to play. Monday and Friday afternoons with always a welcome from someone and always a smile from Frank and Alf. Patient tuition from Bill Smith with lots of laughs not forgetting, Joan's dry wit.

Early July the Sun came out and stayed out. The green became a magnet for people to play, sit in the Sun or cool in the shade, how relaxing it was. In the background always two or three men working.

Warm evenings, watching or playing, midges biting. Regulars, Josie, Joan and Dorothy practicing in every corner. The first ladies friendly with St. Bede's, they had a 'white' Jack - what a grand crowd and how we enjoyed the night. Another friendly at Vernon's, Penwortham, the green enormous, lush and springy with no familiar patches or leaves to guide you, the lights came on, disappeared, returned, some really good matches, and Marie won.

Second away match at St. Bede's - pouring rain - what a laugh Oh: for a wet suit and flippers - Mary - took a dive, very gracefully. The supper was delicious and of course, we talked and talked...

To our last match against St. Gerard' s men. Cathy Brown, complete with head bangers and camera - presentation (to the men) by Frank, and the green closed.

A big thank-you to the people whose determination and hard work made the green possible. To Maureen for her organisation - to Bill Smith for his encouragement - to Betty for her patience - to the many old friends and new friends (wish I could, name you all) I've made - didn't we have fun and a special thank you to Frank R- - - . Roll on next Season.

December 1983 - Father Justin Caldwell was congratulated on becoming our Parish Priest. He was also welcomed as the new President of Our Lady and St. Gerard's Bowling Club. One of the first requests we made to Fr. Justin was for a further loan of £1,300. This Fr. Justin supported and arranged perfectly easily. What encouragement that was to us. This money was to pay for the base of the Bowl House and it's completion. Our commitment to Parish was now £2,300. (This has now been repaid)

What have we got for our money, a very substantial building which Father insured for £5,000? A brand new Mower, £800. Seven sets of bowls, plus 10 match blocks. These worth £30 plus other Bowling Green tools. Not forgetting a Bowling Green.

A new Committee was formed to take us forward into 1984. Eric Topping, Chairman, A. Cook, B. Murphy, J. Robinson, W. Smith, Mrs. J. Rostron, Mrs. M. Cook, Mrs. A Morris, Mrs. E. Snape and Mrs. J. Topping. They still face a lot of work to complete all the amenities for the smooth running of a Bowling Club. Not the least being the completion of the Bowl House.

During the winter months Eddie Roe has built all the dividing walls in the Bowl House. Now there is a Green Keeper's store, a Kitchen, Ladies and Gents Toilets, Storage space and a large communal room. Eddie was helped by Alf Cook, Ken Smith and Derek Swarries, who all gave up 5 weekends, Saturdays and Sundays till 2 and 3 o'clock. Jim Bruce did the plumbing, Ken Phillipson and John Jones the Electric's, Freddie Byrne (deceased) the painting. The last 3 non-parishioners. This work was all done free of charge. Also thanks to Jim Wilson (deceased) for the Trophy Cabinet in the Centre.

What a lucky lot of Bowlers, a grand secluded Green, a Bowl House with toilets and kitchen, plus plenty of space. A John Lee Cup, an Eric Topping Trophy, Fr. Forbes Trophy, Tom Craven Sheild, a Ladies Prize, the President's Trophy and a Ladies v Gents Trophy, Three Men's teams and a Ladies 'team.

But, in this Guild Year of 1992, every credit to the Bowlers, both Ladies and Gentlemen, you fairly have looked after the Green - it is a Picture and Credit to you.

Our thanks go to Frank Rogerson for the use of all his notes in compiling this History.