

HOWICK BOWLING CLUB INC



CENTENARY

2007

Bowls New Zealand

On behalf of Bowls New Zealand please accept our sincere congratulations to the members of the Howick Bowling Club on obtaining centenary status.

The efforts of many volunteers over the years have contributed to the situation that Howick now finds itself in with magnificent facilities.

I wish the Club a very successful centennial season and look forward to joining you at the centennial dinner in October.

Yours sincerely

Kerry Clark OBE
Chief Executive

Auckland Bowls

The game of Lawn Bowls was first played in New Zealand in 1860 and at one time it enjoyed more active participation than any other sport. While participation has declined, in very recent times there are signs of a positive resurgence.

The way the game is played has changed a great deal over recent years. There has been the introduction of sets play, a large increase in social bowlers and the interest shown by collegiate players with lawn bowls being introduced into the school curriculum, to name but a few.

When clubs embrace these changes then they can only grow from strength to strength as they move into the new era. There are indeed exciting times ahead for this game that we all enjoy.

Our Clubs however, remain the back-bone of our game and it is thrilling to see Howick Bowling Club attain this centenary milestone.

Bowling clubs fulfill an important role in the community extending well beyond the green and when one of them has been around for 100 years then it must mean that a large number of people have benefited from its existence.

Howick has a well-known tradition in the Auckland Bowls family of providing excellent greens for competitions, as well as recognized representative players. In addition, it is located in what must be one of the most commanding positions on the Auckland isthmus.

However, a club only exists for so long when there has been an excellent team of volunteers behind the scenes who keep it all together. The essence of any good club are those volunteers along with the grass roots bowler who plays our game for the simple enjoyment of it. All current members must be very grateful for the foresight and stewardship of those who have gone before.

Howick, I am sure you will continue to be a force to be reckoned with in the Auckland Bowls calendar.

Congratulations to Howick Bowling Club for reaching its Centenary – no mean achievement!

On behalf of Auckland Bowls I wish you all a successful centenary season and once again, hearty congratulations.

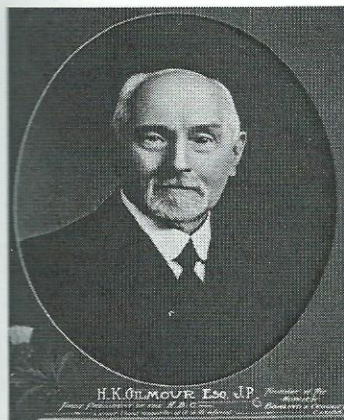
Margaret Smitton
President
Auckland Bowls
25th August 2007

This booklet is a celebration of our club. A 75th anniversary booklet was produced in 1992. This booklet gives some of our founding history but focuses more on recent history and personalities. A club is nothing more than the sum of its members. This booklet celebrates some of our members – some of the stars from the green, the jokers from the clubhouse and the quiet workers who have done so much to make our club what it is today. Apologies to those who are not mentioned – you are valued members of our club and we appreciate your participation.

From A Little Acorn

Never in the wildest dreams could Howick Bowling and Croquet Club founder H K Gilmour, JP, have imagined the little club he set up as a private enterprise 100 years ago would expand into arguably Auckland's finest in terms of its splendid two-storied clubhouse, five greens and picturesque surrounds.

That it has is a tribute and a lasting memorial to the vision and hard work of members who have made the club so successful that all three outdoor greens and the two synthetic surfaces that exist today are fully utilised for summer and winter bowls respectively.



H K Gilmour

As editor and historian Jim Wilkinson explained in the club's 75th anniversary booklet, it all began on Mr Gilmour's own Uxbridge Road property in 1907 before the club leased the property from him in 1911 and bought it two years later upon forming itself into an incorporated society.

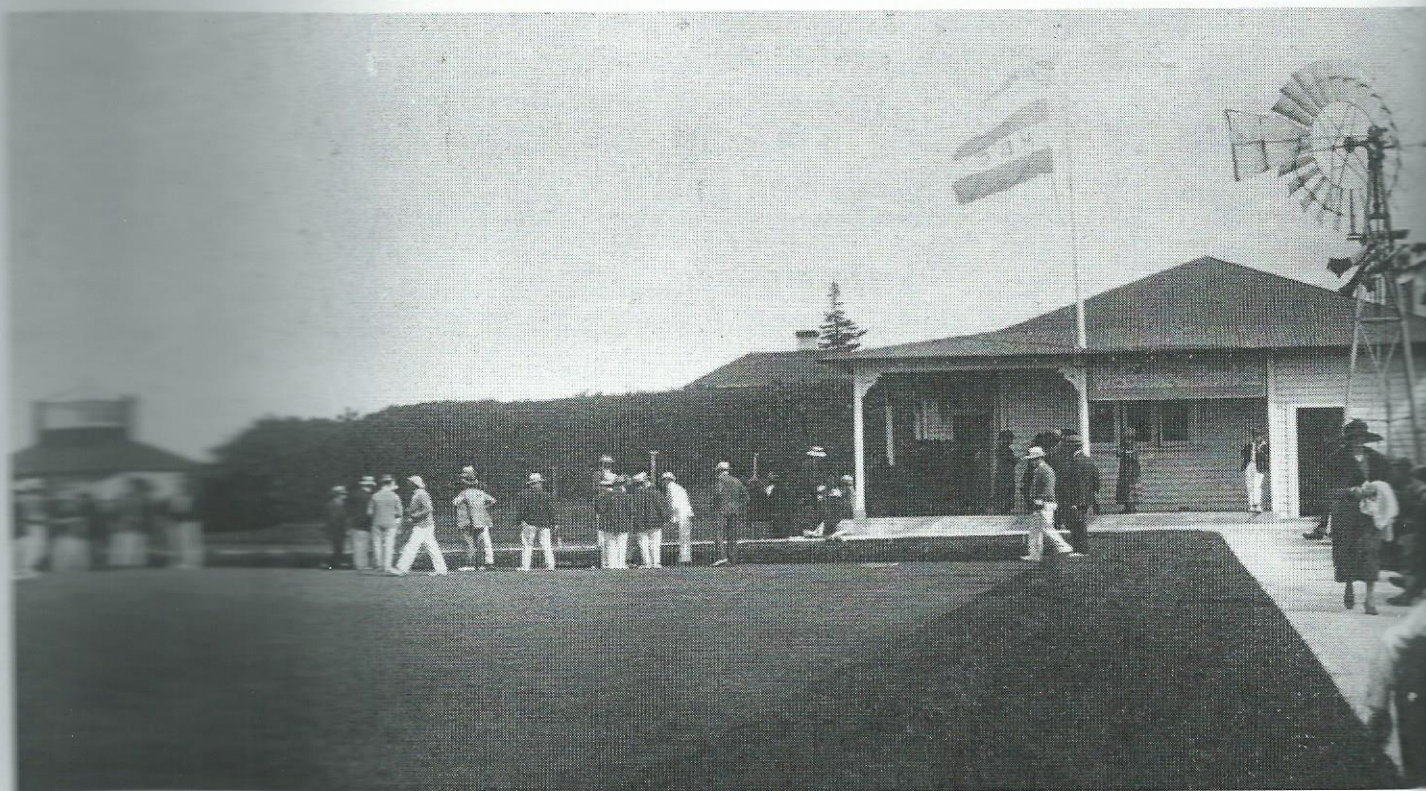
It then consisted of a humble, small clubhouse, one bowling green and two small croquet lawns. Although

it survived two World Wars and the Great Depression, a fire destroyed much of the club's early records.

Patron of the club in 1913 was former Prime Minister, the Honourable Bill Massey. Distinguished local body politicians to have held that position since have been Howick Mayors Sir William Stevenson, Walter Hadrell and Morrin Cooper and Manukau City Council Mayor Sir Barry Curtis, who remains club patron.

The choice of Nixon Park as the new site for the club's 81 bowlers and 35 croquet players in 1957 came as a rude shock to the Howick Horticultural and Beautifying Society which, in May 1942, had purchased the first three sections of land on the corner of Sale St and Selwyn Rd as the first stage towards its plan to develop a miniature Albert Park where native trees would grow and bloom, where shady walks would meander by the side of a tiny streamlet, where a miniature lake would attract native birds, and where people could be entertained by their local band and theatre groups.

The society received further encouragement when Miss Maud Nixon, president of the Croquet Club in 1933-35, purchased two further lots for £170 and presented them to the Town Board, stipulating the area was to be used as a "Reserve and Public Park for all time." From September 1949 to May 1952 the Town Board bought



"Men's Day" at the Uxbridge Road Site

three further blocks, made £3302.

The Society upon learning in 1957 that the Borough was considering developing the site of Nixon Park for recreational and women's croquet played in 1959-60 so the society's plans were on deaf ears.

The club's Mayor William Stevenson, a man, who was the tiny streamlet planned by him. He also feared a gully.

"The council were possible of were received and Domain Reserve for

The old Uxbridge four residential a debenture pavilion on

The club received and Domain expiring on per annum their own L club, the H

three further lots which, with the addition of the Cooper block, made the total purchase of just under six acres for £3302.

The Society protested upon learning in June 1957 that the Howick Borough Council was considering a plan for developing a large part of Nixon Park as a recreational area for men and women bowlers and croquet players for the 1959-60 season but the society's protests fell on deaf ears.



Sir William Stevenson

The club's champion was Mayor William (Alf) Stevenson. A practical man, who was later to be knighted, he could not visualise the tiny streamlet, miniature lake and native trees scheme planned by the Horticultural and Beautifying Society. He also feared septic tank effluent would drain into the gully.

"The council advertised the scheme and asked for possible objections," recorded Jim Wilkinson. "None were received, and under section 13 of the Reserves and Domains Act 1953 the area was declared a Public Reserve for recreational purposes."

The old Uxbridge Road property was subdivided into four residential sections and sold for £7,200 which, with a debenture issue of £1,130, enabled members to erect a pavilion on Nixon Park.



At the start of the project

The club received a Licence to Occupy under the Reserves and Domains Act 1953 for 33 years from October 1959 expiring on September 30 1992 at a rental of one shilling per annum, free of general rates. The ladies received their own Licence to Occupy and became an independent club, the Howick Women's Bowling Club.



Miss E M Nixon & Mr and Mrs Stevenson - Opening of Nixon Centennial Park 1959

Total development costs when converted to dollars was \$31,298 of which the Howick Borough Council's contribution was a generous \$18,274. The share of both bowling clubs was \$13,024, of which the men's was \$10,434. With \$1,434 cash paid, the balance owed was \$9,000 arranged on a 15-year amortisation basis at 4 per cent per annum, final payment due in 1975.

Some 10 years later a sub-committee consisting of Keith Bell, his brother Bruce, Charlie Marshall and Ernie Petrie listed as its priorities a sewer connection, rubber belting for backs of ditches, marking out of car parks, purchase of extra seating, building extensions, the establishment of a cotula green, installation of a public address system and provision of upstairs men's toilets. In 1973 a building committee was set up to consider clubhouse extensions while a finance committee went into costs.



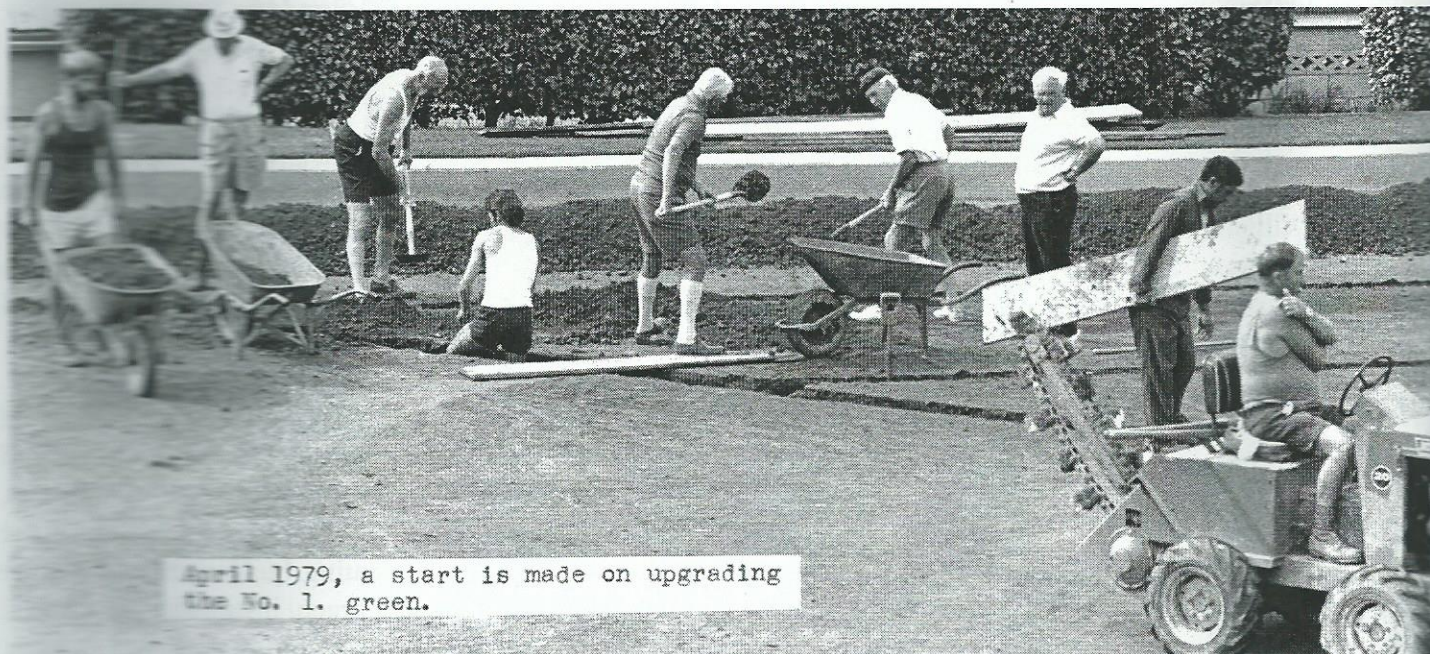
The New Club House - Men v Women 1975

The Howick Borough Council met the club's request by offering a grant of \$5000 and a loan of \$7000 at 4% per annum for a period of 12 years. This, plus \$10,000 raised by a debenture issue to members, was sufficient to have the work done by builder Graham Boyd, an invaluable club member and one of its finest servants. The new building which was officially opened in 1974

included improved kitchen, bar, lounge and a meeting room for the croquet club with enlarged locker room and match committee room in the half basement area below.

The next major project was in 1979, under the reign of club president and greens superintendent Bert Dowdswell, when herring bone drainage was installed in A green by a contractor, assisted by an army of

club members. Six hundred wooden pegs were used in conjunction with a theodolite to level the surface. In March, 1980, the surface was planed by a special machine and cotula and brown top were sown. A year later a similar programme was carried out on B green when a concrete water tank holding 6000 gallons was also built in readiness for a new automatic watering system. Water was found underground by a water diviner and a tank kept filled by an electric pump.



Herring bone drainage 1979

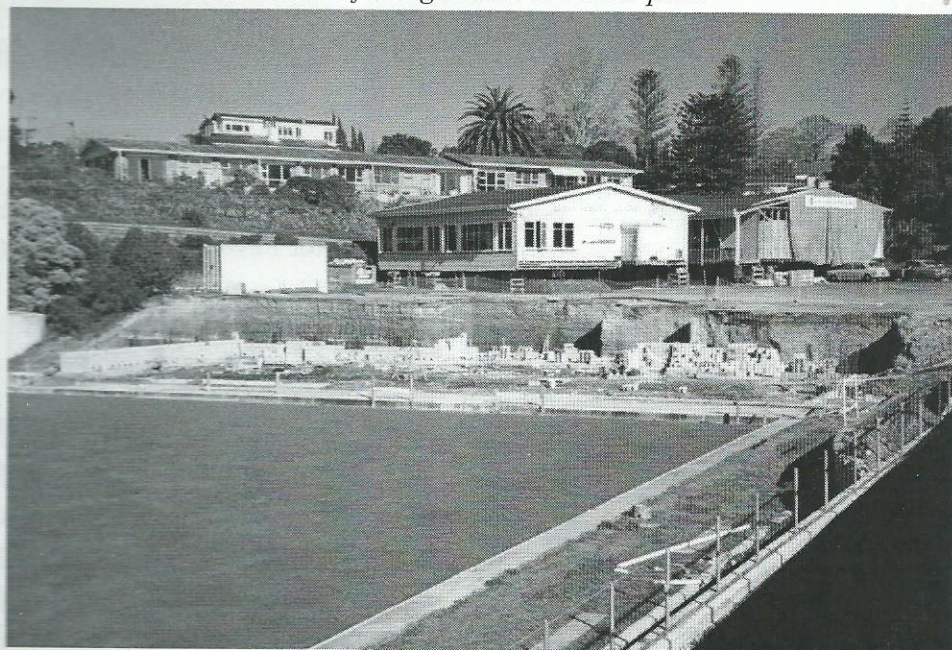


Preparing the greens for cotula c 1980

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The second half being hauled to the car park

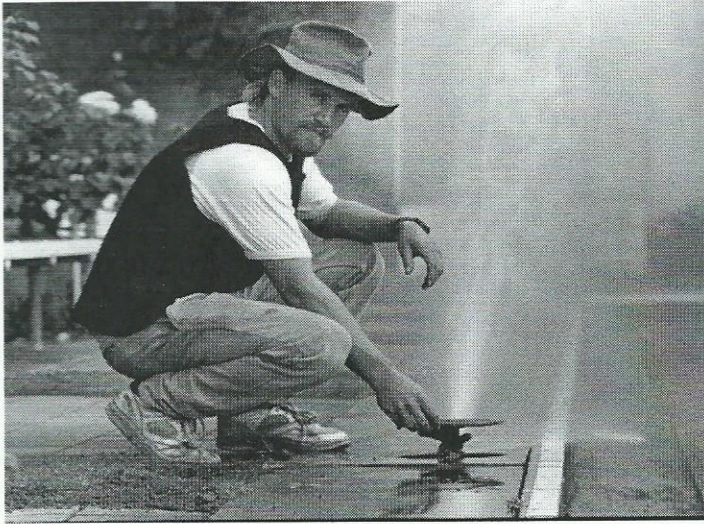


The total clubhouse removed for basement construction



Some of the crew

Initially, however, there was strong opposition from the croquet players, whose numbers were dwindling and whose lack of male members to assist in working bees was seen by the bowlers as a drain on their resources, especially that of greenkeeper Paul Hickey who was required to care for their three lawns as well as the three bowling greens.

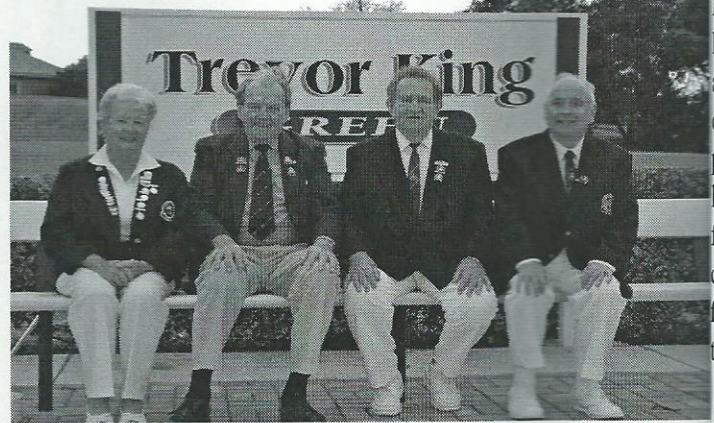


The new sprinkler system

"While our plan had overwhelming support from the bowlers, it was still necessary to negotiate with the croquet club which felt it was being evicted," recalls King. "Eventually the matter was resolved when we helped it with \$20,000 of funding so it could take advantage of its own scheme with the Manukau City Council on Millhouse Drive where it has grown and prospered."

"The work to the bowling club clubhouse, greens and surrounds was completed in 1994 and has operated beyond what most people could dream of at the time," says King. "It was amazing to see the input of the voluntary labourers who worked a combined total of 25,000 hours for a period of four months while the woman supplied the refreshments. The results speak for themselves and all debt has been repaid. In 1995-96 the club hosted what many felt was the best national bowling tournament ever to be held, and in 2002-03 was named Auckland Club of the Year."

Beyond the original \$1 million plan, more than \$300,000 has been spent from grants at no cost to the club for new furniture, the downstairs kitchen, oven, soil shed, awnings, shelters, speaker system, C Green upgrade, scoreboards, car parks, mower and sprinkler system.



Pat Carnie, Trevor King, Alf Dalton, Henry Perkins

While the visionary King was the catalyst behind such mammoth changes, he is the first to emphasise it would not have eventuated without the total support of many others.

Among them he lists the Manukau City Council and Sir Barry Curtis in particular, along with the total commitment of club stalwarts such as Alf Dalton, John Holt, Bill Templeton, Syd Campbell, Bob Parker, Paul Farrands, the late Robert Gibson, and "many others, too numerous to mention." His one regret is it also cost him the loss of some personal friendships with people who did not agree with the project.

The Nixon Park Bowls Board has not rested on its laurels. Over the last year funding has been obtained by way of grants from the ASB Bank Trust (\$96,000), Howick Community Board (\$78,000), Manukau City Council (\$50,000), Lion Foundation (\$50,000) and Southern Trust (\$20,000), a total of \$294,000 in all. The men and women bowlers have donated a further \$100,000 allowing further improvements to the facilities which will soon include two re-surfaced all-weather greens, renovations to the clubhouse and a clubhouse lift.

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An Amazing Transformation *by Bob Holt*

Having transferred from Carlton in the 1962-63 season, I am the Howick Men's Bowling Club's longest serving member, although by no means its oldest bowler. It is with pride that I have seen its lengthy transformation from a small country club to probably the finest bowling facility in the country



Bob Holt

Although Howick was one of Auckland's earliest settlements, its distance from the city ensured it retained its rural coast character for many years and development of the area did not begin in earnest until the early sixties. City bowlers never ventured this far out to play in tournaments and with the poor greens and facilities available at the time there was no incentive for them to do so.

The membership of the club at that time was dominated by retired farmers, bank managers, school teachers and pensioners who were generally careful with their cash and cautious in their attitude, content to plod along with sub standard facilities. All the work on the greens was carried out voluntarily by members under the direction of Bruce Bell, our hands on greens superintendent from 1968 to 1977, and only in latter years was outside help employed on a casual basis. The three greens were originally sown with browntop grass seeds and inevitably were invaded by a wide variety of other grasses and weeds. Levelling was a major problem for amateurs without the knowledge or equipment required to obtain a true surface and the variations from rink to rink was a real frustration for the players. The women's green was particularly uneven with odd tracks everywhere and to draw a shot required great concentration, a good memory of the peculiar characteristics of each rink and a lot of God given luck.

Subscription levels were always held at the lowest possible level and were therefore insufficient to allow for a professional greenkeeper to be employed fulltime. Occasionally part time advisers were employed but often they caused more problems than they cured. The women's club suffered financial loss when one alleged expert greenkeeper promised to cure their problems but did a runner as soon as some up front money was in his hands.

Eventually retired headmaster Bob Jessop accepted the task of greens superintendent for both men's and women's clubs in order to make improvements and employed the late Alec McAlister as a greens advisor and tutor for our shy, budding apprentice Paul Hickey. Alec had more knowledge on the care and development of cotula greens than any other greenkeeper in Auckland and many clubs sought his advice. He did not suffer fools gladly and if his advice was not followed to the letter he would immediately withdraw his services. Bob Jessop knew how to handle him and they became good friends and Alec also took a shine to young Paul and taught him as much as he could about the art of green keeping before Alec and Bob Jessop passed on to greener pastures. When Paul first received the award of Auckland Greenkeeper of the Year it was a a fitting posthumous tribute to Bob and Alec.

When I first joined Howick, the difference in the administration of the men and women's club provided a stark contrast. Whereas the women were much more precise with strict dress codes and adherence to the rules, the men were sloppy in their attire, much to the ladies irritation. For years past president Bob Garrett, whose wife was also president of the women's club, tried to introduce dress rules to all men's weekend roll ups and midweek tournaments but was always outvoted. Some of the ex farmers dressed for roll ups as they did for milking the cows, but gradually the standard improved and today casual dress is accepted without question.

The women were far more aggressive and worked diligently to raise funds for a new clubhouse alongside the now Trevor King Green which, when completed, became the benchmark for the men and set the wheels of change in motion. The women tried desperately to obtain borough council approval for a second green on the seaward side of Nixon Park but resident opposition stopped it from happening. The growth of their club was halted by this decision, so B green was shared with the men by arrangement.

However by 1970 both clubs finally had to close off new memberships pending further vacancies and the decision was made to double the size of the men's pavilion. The original building was only one quarter the size of our present upper floor and beneath it was a small basement that was portioned into a locker room, match committee room and a tiny room that housed a beer fridge and a sliding servery into the locker room.

Retired headmaster and club president Tom Kerr, together with Alf Edwards, Russ Rice, Jim Croxton and Bert Dowdeswell, were given the task of drafting plans and another member, Graham Boyd, later to become president, undertook the building contract at a very friendly rate. Jim Croxton and Bert Dowdeswell in turn became club presidents.

The new building that was officially opened in 1974 included improved kitchen, bar, lounge and meeting room for the croquet club with enlarged locker room and a match committee room in the half basement area below. This served us well until the late eighties when it became clear that both clubs were headed into the doldrums and further changes were needed to ensure their survival.

The Croquet Club's membership had diminished and without enough active men in their ranks to share the day to day maintenance of their two greens, became an unwelcome drag on the men's bowling club's resources. This was resolved when Trevor King forwarded his proposal to house both bowling clubs in a redeveloped and expanded pavilion and relocate the Croquet Club to council land on Millhouse Drive, thus allowing the bowling clubs to replace the two croquet greens with all weather bowling greens. The council agreed to purchase the women's clubhouse for use by community groups and the proceeds of the sale were used in the redevelopment of the new pavilion.

Work began on the pavilion site in February 1994 by splitting the building into two sections and lifting them onto the car park area, allowing excavation of the site to accommodate a basement encompassing the full length of the new pavilion. A contract was let for this part of the project and earthworks commenced on the site of the proposed greens at the same time.

With club membership near its highest peak, we were fortunate to have within our ranks a number of skilled tradesmen available to direct and train the small army of volunteers building retaining walls and forming the greens. The women's clubhouse became our base and the women provided food and refreshment for the workers for the next four months. Two expert green layers were flown from Newcastle, Australia, and the Supergrasse surface was laid on a bed of slag that was donated to the club by the Greenbrook Steel Mill. Club member, the late Robert Gibson, designed and supervised the construction of the walls and also arranged for the free use of trucks through his employer Fletcher Construction Ltd to transport the vast quantity of slag from the mill. Alan McNair

served as Clerk of Works but resigned unexpectedly. So Syd Campbell became our guide and advisor and his contribution to our club has and still is outstanding.

Before approval of the project there was an element of fear and distrust within the ranks of both the men and women's clubs, to be replaced by a feeling of excitement amongst friends with a common goal once work started. The choice of Supergrasse was made after considerable research of products available then by a committee including Trevor King, Alf Dalton, John Holt and Bill Templeton. The promised life expectancy of ten years has been exceeded by two before two new greens will be installed late this year.

One tragic experience during my term with the club was playing a fours against a friend called Stewart Jerram who, in the final end of the game, drew a toucher that rested on the jack but never lived to see it. We resuscitated his heart but he was brain dead and life support was disconnected two days later.

Some characters such as the late Gordon Smith stick in your mind, not only for being a truly gifted draw player but also for his crusty responses when his team members played short bowls, for that was a fault he could not abide. A five times in a row singles champion and skip of the 1974 Auckland centre's champion of champions four team, Gordon served as club secretary and treasurer for a lengthy period. He was a very down to earth man who liked nothing more than enjoying a few drinks and a yarn with his mates at the end of the day. My late dad Albert and Gordon were true mates on and off the greens and enjoyed mixing socially with their respective wives, Margery and my mother, Joy.

I also clearly recall being knocked out of a club singles semi-final by Alan Firth after he had destroyed eleven consecutive heads when I was holding close shots. With the eye of an eagle and a totally unpredictable strategy, Alan was a fierce competitor through to his eighties. He was also noted for his heart attacks and on more than one occasion had been assumed dead on arrival at hospital but was revived to fight another day.

Another old timer who hated being beaten was George Hughes and his temper displays were legendary. He was constantly in trouble with the committee for using that well known four letter word. There have been many interesting characters over the years whose deeds will undoubtedly be regaled by old bowlers during our centennial celebrations.

[3 of 35]

8 November 1908

The recently formed Howick Bowling Club's greens and **croquet** lawn in Uxbridge Road are formally opened (see also 31 March 1952).

[Related events...](#)

[Further information...](#)

[25 of 35]

31 March 1952

A competition is held to design the layout of Howick's proposed Nixon Centennial Park, situated on a large triangular piece of land in the gully between Selwyn Road and Sale Street. The park's name honours local resident Miss Emilia Maud Nixon, who had donated some of the land for the park to the Howick Town Board, along with a substantial sum towards its development. After some controversy, the park is designated as the home of the Howick Bowling and **Croquet** Club (see also 10 October 1959).

[Related events...](#)

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[28 of 35]

10 October 1959

Nixon Centennial Park, Howick is officially opened. The park's name honours local resident Miss Emilia Maud Nixon, who had some years earlier donated some of the land for the park to the Howick Town Board, along with a substantial sum towards its development. The Howick Bowling and **Croquet** club's new greens and pavilion at the park are opened on the same day (see also 19 October 1974).

[Related events...](#)

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[30 of 35]

19 October 1974

The Howick Bowling Club opens extensions to its clubrooms in Nixon Centennial Park, including a members' lounge (see also 9 September 1995).

[Related events...](#)

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[34 of 35]

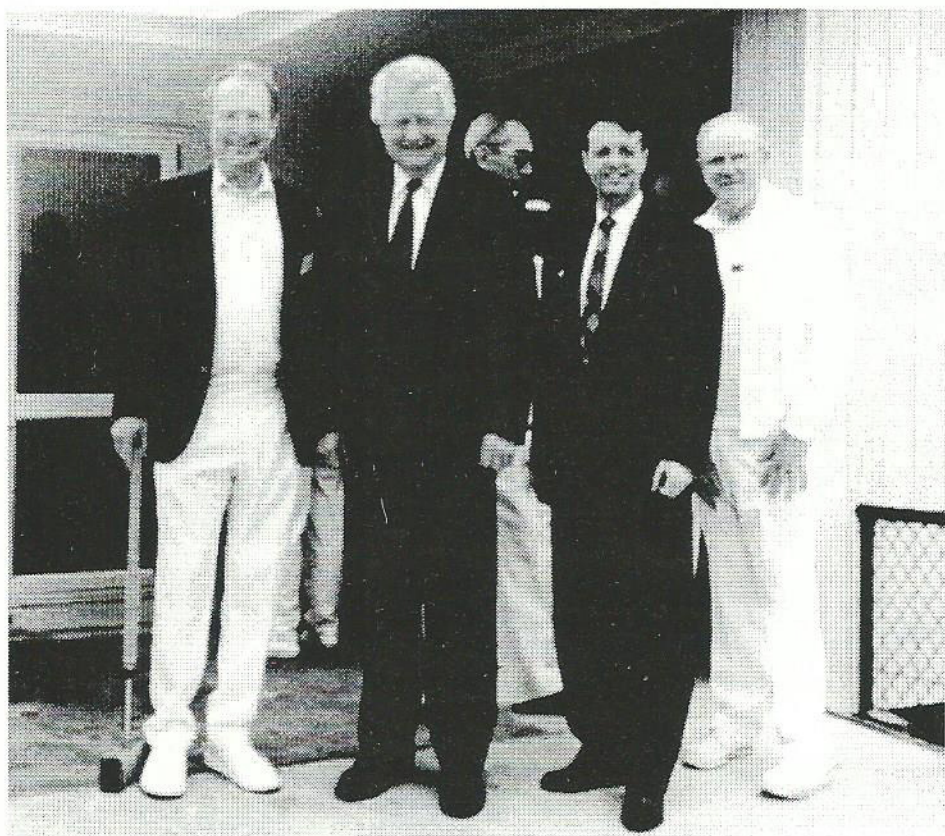
September 1996

The Howick **Croquet** Club moves from Nixon Centennial Park to the Millhouse Reserve, also relocating its clubhouse there.

[Further information...](#)



Howick Croquet Club Reopens



From left to right: Peter Sukolski, President Howick; Sir Barry Curtis, Mayor of Manukau City; (behind) Rick Holmes, Pukekohe C.C.; Ross Robertson, our M.P. (Manukau East); Bernard Smith, Sec. Howick C.C.

One of New Zealand's oldest Croquet Clubs recently had its official opening at a new venue in Millhouse Drive Reserve, Howick.

Originally started in 1907 in association with men's Bowling in Uxbridge Road, Howick, there were two croquet lawns and one bowling green. Membership at the time was on a par with bowls right through until the late 1940's. The site was purchased in 1913 and carried on until 1959 -60 when the opportunity arose to sell and purchase a larger site at Nixon Park, again in association with the Bowling Club. Over the years until the early 90's bowls grew more rapidly than croquet and sadly the Bowling Club took over the Croquet lawns and Howick Croquet was left in limbo for the next two years. Players travelled to Papatoetoe Croquet Club, renting their lawns for two club days a week with a combined club day on Saturdays. In 1996 land became available at Millhouse Reserve. The old clubhouse was moved to the new site, enlarged and modernised. Thanks are due to the ASB Bank Community Trust, the Lottery Commission, the Hillary Commission, the Lion Foundation and Manukau City Council, not forgetting our members and supporters who put in MANY hours of voluntary labour.

There are four lawns fully fenced and after the first season were deemed fit for the Nationals which proved very successful with plenty of praise at their condition after such a short time.

We are currently using the facilities for "Mah Jong", "500" as well as introducing Social and Association Croquet to new players.

Contributed by Audrey Denton



'Bowling Greens, Howick', ca 1915.

View of the Howick Bowling Club's greens in Uxbridge Road, with bowlers active, ca 1915.

Creator: Unknown ('Tourist Series, 425')

Date: ca 1915

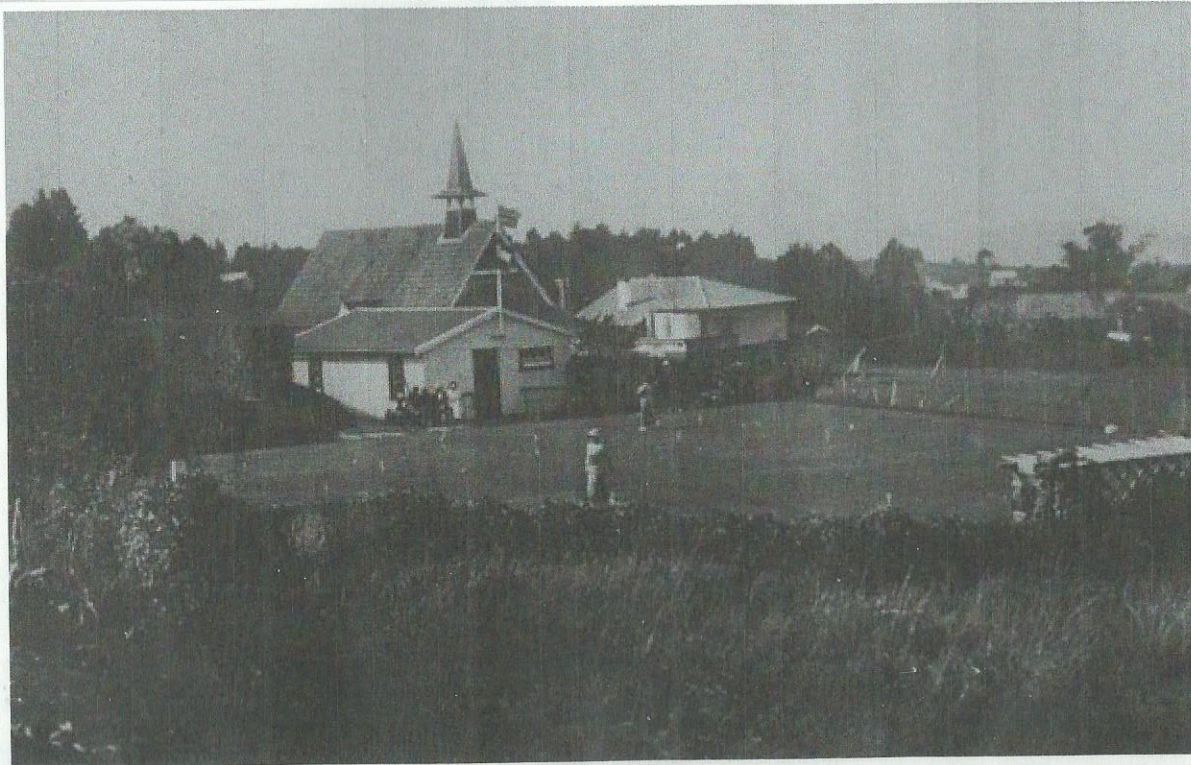
Location: Howick

Medium: Black and white photograph

Howick Library photograph collection, no. 187 /
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Croquet lawn, Howick, ca 1927.

The croquet lawn at the Howick Bowling Club in Uxbridge Road, ca 1927. The roof of Uxbridge Presbyterian Church can be seen behind.

Creator: Rishworth series, 25

Date: ca 1927

Location: Howick

Medium: Black and white photograph

Howick Library photograph collection, no. 182.

Photograph reproduced by courtesy of Howick
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When the Howick Bowling and Croquet Club first opened in 1907, it was as a private venture, under the auspices of Mr H K Gilmour. When it became a financial failure, a society was formed to lease the property and create the nucleus of the club as we now know it. The club greens were in Uxbridge Road behind the then Presbyterian Church, now the Uxbridge Community Centre.

In 1952, when the Howick Town Board purchased for three thousand, three hundred and two pounds, the Cooper block, comprising six acres, facing Sale Street and Selwyn Road, Miss E M Nixon predicted that the land would form the basis for a central and attractive park development. The Howick Borough Council and the Howick Horticultural and Beautifying Society joined forces to plan the development of Nixon Park, referring to the concept as a miniature Albert Park in the midst of Howick. The combined clubs transferred to the present location from Uxbridge Road in the 1959 - 60 season with thirty five croquet playing members. The Howick Bowling and Croquet Club A.G.M. report for 1947 records that Miss Nixon was repaid the balance of the mortgage she held, and that she donated the interest, amounting to nineteen pounds, three shillings and ninepence, to the club.

A broad section of Howick businessmen and Civic Office holders have been involved with the club as officers.

Croquet Presidents over the years include Mesdames H K Gilmour, J Wyatt, L G Turner, R Litten, Lady Stevenson and Misses M Motion and E M Nixon. More recent presidents still involved with the Croquet Club or the sport, include long

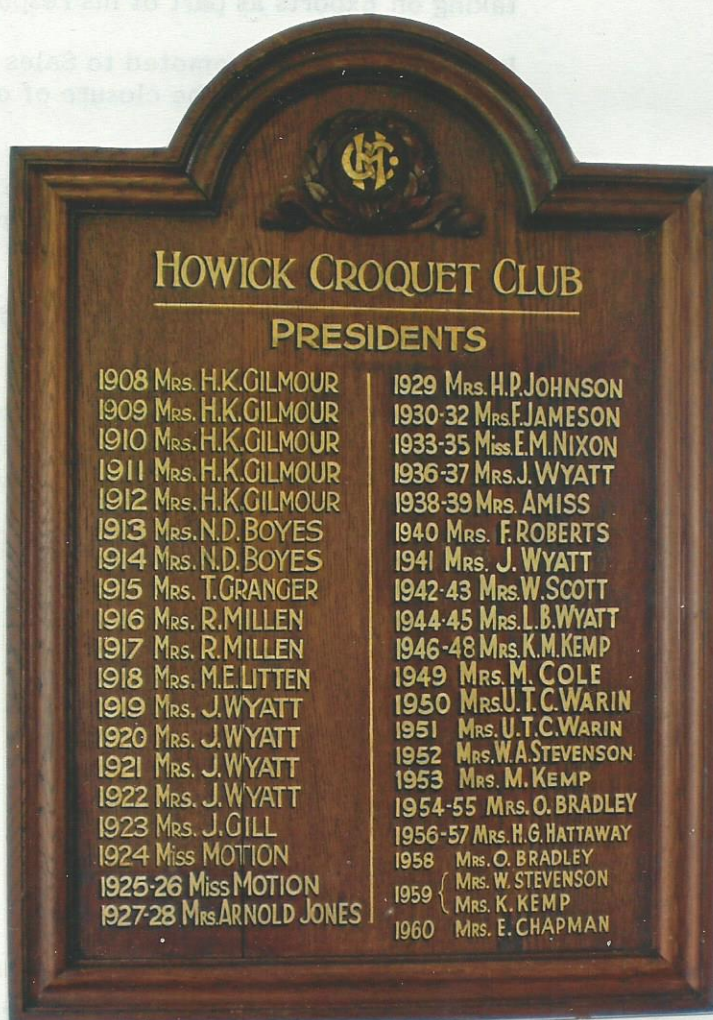
Howick Croquet Club

There has been a Howick Croquet Club ever since 1907. Originally situated in the Uxbridge Road in association with the Men's Bowling Club, there were two croquet lawns and one bowling green. In 1959-60 both clubs moved to Nixon Park. The Croquet Club now had three lawns at different levels. From the top lawn there was a view of the sea. In March 1994 the croquet club had separated from the bowling club and had to vacate Nixon Park.

For two years Howick rented lawns from Papatoetoe Croquet Club for their two club days. On Saturdays the two clubs enjoyed playing together. During this time council land became available at Millhouse Reserve Howick. The old clubhouse was relocated to the new site. It was extended and renovated with members doing the painting, both outside and the interior.

In September 1996 with the help of ASB Bank Community Trust, the Lottery Commission, the Hillary Commission, the Lion Foundation, Manukau City Council and Supporters Club, we started playing at Millhouse Reserve.

To help with club funds, we have a "Mah Jong" group and "500" card club, whose members join in club functions. On Wednesday mornings Fun Croquet is organised to encourage new players. This has been successful in recruiting new members. Although we have lost our sea view we now have four lawns on level ground.





1958 Howick bowling and croquet clubs, Uxbridge Rd. (1907 - 1960)



Howick C.C.



1990 Three 'stepped' lawns at
Howick Bowling Club, Nixon Park



2011 From Howick B.C. clubrooms.
Two bowling rinks occupy land
formerly used by croquet club

Howick

