

# GOODBYE TO 100 YEARS OF LAWN BOWLS

NEW LISTING



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ITI CLUB. (New Zealand Herald, 1928-11-0

## CROQUET OPENING.

Under most favourable conditions the Rawhiti croquet lawns were opened yesterday afternoon. Mrs Sawyer, president, welcomed the many visitors from other clubs and declared the lawns opened. Eight full lawns were occupied in progressive croquet matches, the balls running very smoothly on the beautiful greens. Twenty-seven visiting players from other clubs participated and a most pleasurable afternoon was spent. This was largely due to the arrangements made by the president, Mrs. Sawyer, the secretary, Mrs. Morton, and to the ladies of the committee who provided a tempting afternoon tea and attended to their guests. The tables were decorated in the club colours, brown and gold, with Iceland poppies, calceolaria and asparagus fern. Protected from the sun, tea was served in the open, and this was an added pleasure. Mrs. Hodson won the first prize for A players and Mrs. Chapman the first prize for B players. The A consolation prize was won by Mrs. White and Mrs. Cutler the consolation prize for B players.

Among those present were the following:—Mrs. Sawyer (president), who wore navy blue charmaline costume and saxe blue hat; Mrs. Morton (secretary), rose beige jersey, velour hat to match; Mrs.

The Rawhiti Bowling Club was formed in 1913. The press report has been retained in the Club records and is reproduced in this booklet. A Sporting Centre was formed with the present site of 'A' Green as a Bowling Green, 'B' Green was utilised for Croquet and two grass and one bitumen tennis courts were located on 'C' Green.

Initially the separate sporting codes worked in harmony in a small one room Club House which over the years was extended. The compatibility was demonstrated by the use of 'B' Green for Winter Bowls and for Croquet in the Summer. In the passage of time however, the bowling members grew and the Croquet membership diminished. At a special General Meeting in the early 1940's, Croquet was ousted by a very small majority and two members resigned in protest.





**Bowled over:** Rawhiti Bowling Club president Eric Rawson says there is no longer enough interest in bowls to keep the club viable. The 97-year-old club has applied to have its land rezoned so it can be sold.

Photo: FIONA GOODALL

# Bowls club in strife



## CLUB BEGINNINGS

The origin of Bowls in Great Britain is lost in antiquity and there is no proof that the game came to England with the Normans in 1066. However it is certain that Southampton had a Green in 1299 and what is more, that it still exists.

Who has not read that Sir Francis Drake finished his game on Plymouth Hoe before engaging the Spanish Armada in 1588 and cutting that proud fleet to pieces? One reference has it that Drake wanted to see the game out but was prevailed on to play out the rubber with the Spaniards. Whichever is the true version matters little but it does appear that at that date the game had a secure grip on those participating which has certainly not slackened over the centuries.

William Shakespeare's many references to the game disclose that he was a player and that even 380 years ago bias had been given to Bowls and that the "woods" were played towards "the jack".

Bowls have been played on the Continent for at least 500 years as the soldiers of Henry VI played a bowling game of sorts, at Rouen, prior to the burning of Joan of Arc of 1431. The continental rules may vary, but the basic principle of their Bowls are similar.

It is believed that early Maoris in New Zealand were acquainted with the idea of the game and stones found in the Bay of Plenty give credence to this.

While Rawhiti Bowling Club can be justifiably proud of its 75 years, it is a "johnny come lately" in terms of the establishment of formalised bowling in the colony of New Zealand.

The Auckland Bowling Club's Green was commenced in 1861 at the lower end of Grafton Road adjoining the Stanley Street entrance to the Public Domain. It appears there was no great rush by other centres within the colony to emulate the Club, which is believed to be the first in the Southern Hemisphere and the next recorded initiation was the Wellington Bowling Club Ltd during the latter part of 1886.

In the Auckland area, Ponsonby was formed in 1893, Newmarket in 1894 and Remuera and Devonport in 1895. With the establishment of

Mount Eden Bowling Club in 1896, it can be seen the game of Bowls was firmly established in the colony. Northern and Southern Bowling Associations covering the North and South Islands were formed before the turn of the century.



*An undated early photograph of members on Opening Day. Afternoon Tea was served from the hatch on the left. Note the varied bowling attire.*

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The Tennis Club remained strong through these years but in due course membership also declined and 'C' Green was formed in the 1963/64 Season.

It is interesting to note that decisions made in early club years were no more reliable than those which members at times criticize today. In the early 1940's it was decided that it would be of advantage for the Club to have its own water supply. A Water Diviner was employed who assured the Executive Committee that water was available in large quantities under 'B' Green. A Tank and Pump House were built on the middle of the Ara Street bank and drilling of the bore at the side of the Green commenced. After 300 feet, water was eventually located, however the supply soon ran out. The 1946 Balance Sheets notes the Bore Account at the depreciated value of Stg 337 and as the Bowling Greens and Tennis Courts are recorded at Stg 378, the magnitude of the error can be realised.

It is obvious Bowls on a Sunday was not commonplace in Auckland in the 1940's and the following was recorded in the Executive Report of 1949:

"The result of Rawhiti's first essay into this hitherto unexplored department is a distinct compliment to those responsible for arrangement and Management. Those wishing to take advantage of the facilities provided, will enjoy a quiet and happy roll-up and never in the slightest degree is there anything to offend the most fastidious. The game, the afternoon tea and the whole afternoon is conducted always with scrupulous attention to quiet and dignity."

The introduction of the Rawhiti Womens Bowling Club occurred in the 1952/53 Season after protracted negotiations. Initially an approach was made by ladies associated with the Parnell Bowling Club requesting the formation of a Womens Club at Rawhiti. The request included certain stipulations such as a seat on the Executive Committee and was rejected. It is reported that as an aid to finances a special General Meeting was called to admit the ladies and by a one vote majority entry was gained. It was obviously a contentious issue and the following is an extract from a letter written to the ladies:

"There is one little matter which I have been requested to desire you to bring to the attention of your members. We know it only has to be

mentioned to be dealt with in terms of your Club's usual efficiency.

Apparently a certain amount of thoughtlessness results in certain bits and pieces being left about after your Club's use of our grounds and facilities. This particularly in the Locker Room, although other bits and pieces have been left in the Main Hall."

It is left for us to wonder some 35 years later as to the nature of the "bits and pieces".

Successive Minutes of Annual Meetings record the happy relations between the two Clubs and give recognition of the valuable services rendered by the Rawhiti Womens Bowling Club in making the complex what it is today.

While records are not available in depth prior to World War II, it is obvious that Rawhiti members have always been a festive group and it is recorded on faded undated Minutes of an Executive Meeting "That quite a number of the newer members were concerned with the noise in the Club House after the Saturday afternoon matches and even when play offs were taking place. That they missed the opportunity for a quiet sit down and chat with a glass between themselves and that the noise was aggravated by the piano and singing and incidentally the Meeting had earlier dealt with the question of a ukelele."

Long may the spirit continue.

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The Winter Green is now open for play on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

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## SUBSEQUENT DEVELOPMENTS

### LAND

The site occupied by Rawhiti Bowling Club was developed as a sporting centre from an area which was originally farmed. Close to the base of the Remuera Ridge, it forms a natural catchment area with the main water flow emanating from the old Julian Street Creek now known as Entrican Avenue. In recent times a heavy downpour resulted in a flood up to the window level of members cars parked in Rakau Street.

The property was contoured with grass banks between the Club House and 'A' and 'B' Greens. Sir William Stevenson was a great benefactor to the Club over the years and the erection of the retaining wall between 'A' and 'B' Greens at a cost of Stg 1,000 was a donation by him. Club labour organised by present member Harold Paterson erected the canopy.

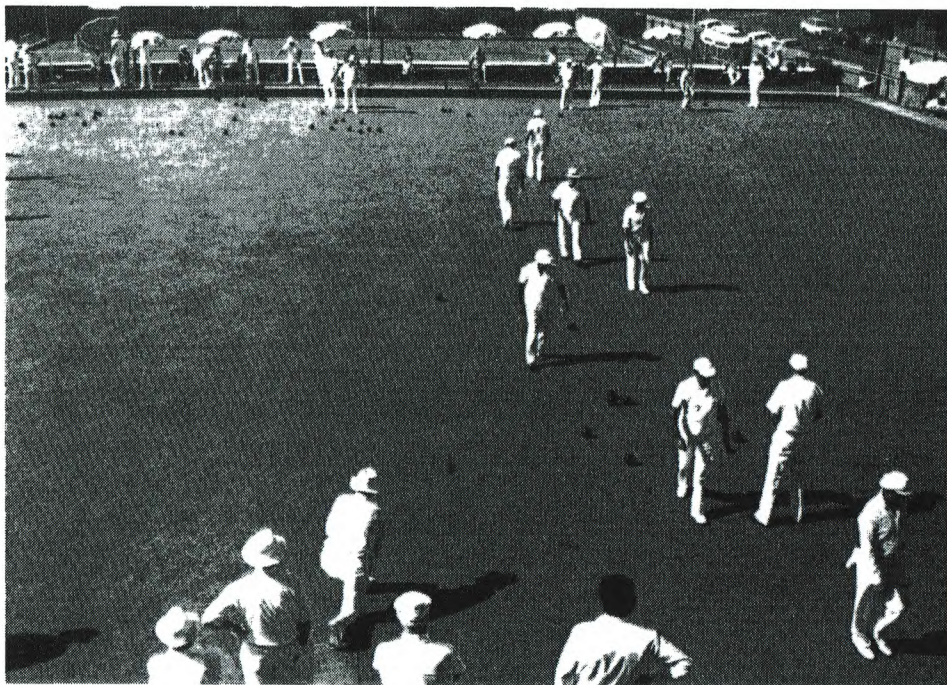
The creation of 'C' Green as an all weather surface was completed in the 1963-64 season on the demise of the Tennis Club and major alterations to the land were carried out by voluntary Club labour. The Tennis area was excavated to a depth of 250mm and the Rangitoto Road bank was removed to allow the building of the present soil shed. Once again Sir William Stevenson came to the aid of the Club by donating the stone for the retention of this area. Club members Fred Vervoort and Cass Cassidy were employed to erect the attractive wall bearing the Club name on the side of the Green.

A magnificent hedge marked the Club's Rakau and Ara Street boundaries for many years and what a maintenance problem that must have been. With the passage of time it withered and sections began to fall over. A decision was made to remove it entirely during the 1958-59 season and Mr Trevor White, Contractor, of Ellerslie was engaged to erect a wooden fence for a sum of Stg 600.

Prior to the 1950's, the site presented a very different picture to that



of today, with three Tennis Courts at the side enclosed with wire netting and a Croquet Green at the bottom with gently sloping banks. The creation of Lawn Bowls ditches and excavation to form 'C' Green with the removal of associated buildings by Club labour represented a tremendous personal commitment by members to provide facilities which today are as fine as any in the country.



*'A' Green in perfect condition for the National Champs in 1985. Two Rawhiti teams play in post section play on adjoining rinks. Centre, Jim Levens, draws for Keith Wilson's team while Nick Unkovich's team crosses over on the right.*

## GREENS

As in most Clubs the trials and tribulations of producing a consistent ground cover and true running surface have seen the rise and fall of many a Rawhiti Greens Superintendent and Green Keeper. The Club has been fortunate in the quality of the people who have taken on these arduous tasks over the years to the delight or frustration of members who are consistently of the opinion that they know far more about the subject anyway.

A review of Club records show many a Club personality who has at one stage of his career taken on the arduous position of Greens Superintendent. Some were successful and some were not. Imagine the chagrin of Charlie Ryman who in 1940 sacked his Greens Keeper and in a short space of time the word "C. Ryman" appeared poisoned in 'A' Green for the world to see.

Our redoubtable life member, Jack McSweeney, produced magnificent Greens through the 1960's on the basis that if a seagull flew over, then rain must be imminent and play should cease.

Fashions change and so do the surface coverings of Lawn Bowls Greens. The original sowing was in Brown Top Grass which until recently was the favoured cover in Auckland. With what appears to be regularly spaced hick-ups, Rawhiti has produced Greens of superior quality. The weed Hydracotyle was always present and at times took over completely to give a tremendously fast surface. Grass Greens in Auckland were susceptible to rain and Rawhiti members for years spoke in awe of the Cotula all-weather Greens after the annual pilgrimage many took to New Plymouth to play in the Taranaki Open Fours. A Sub Committee was set up in 1979 to investigate the feasibility of relaying the Greens in Cotula. It was eventually decided to carry out renovations using the Cotula Maniototo variety and this was sourced from Palmerston North and sown in 'A' and 'B' Greens on April 24th 1981. A modern pop-up sprinkler system was also purchased to give the regular irrigation the weed requires in humid Auckland conditions.

'C' Green was converted in 1986 after extensive ploughing and re-levelling and planting of stolons from the other Greens. During this



time considerable assistance was given by the New Zealand Turf Culture Institute. All three Greens have a complete cover today and are very capably administered by Superintendent Bob Bilkey and Greens Keeper Pat Campbell.



*The old Tennis Court is graded in preparation of 'C' green.*

It is interesting to note that historically 'B' Green has proved to have provided the most reliable playing surface. Due to its proximity to the Club House, 'A' Green bears the brunt of play. Over the years it has required more attention and has twice had 75mm of soil removed through excesses of Bluestone being applied. On one occasion trucks on the Green were bogged down in the rain and hoses were borrowed from neighbours to siphon the water off the surface.

'C' Green was formed by ploughing the Tennis Courts by tractor and discarding the top 75mm. The residue of the soil was sterilised and reused. A base of scoria was first laid and is about 150mm below the present surface giving the Green excellent draining properties and its suitability for winter Bowls.

Throughout the years the Club has always ensured that the Greens Plant and Equipment have been to the highest standard. The modern Equipment in place today reflects a commitment to good Greens and is a continuance of an attitude which saw an indent order placed in the late 1950's for a Ransome Mower to be delivered ex England in nine months. The long delay was accepted by the Committee of the day to

obtain the best.

Finally to all the Supervisors, Green Keepers and Green Committees over the past 75 years, whether you were successful or otherwise, your efforts have been deeply appreciated by all members past and present, even by your critics.

## BUILDINGS

Surely the most fascinating drama in the rich history of Rawhiti has been the development of its Pavilion. The battles with the Town Planning Authority, the neighbours, Securitibank and thwarted Special Meetings, litter Minutes going back over many years and



*Extensions have been added to the original building as shown in this Opening Day scene. The right hand room was called "the crying room".*

make an interesting backdrop to renovations which are being completed in the 75th Jubilee year.

The first building was a small hall complete with a hatch from which afternoon tea was served and this suited the Club's require-



ments for many years. It was large enough to accommodate two Indoor Bowling Mats and it is reported that at times it was hard to see the other end of the Mat through the smoke haze.

A Match Committee Room was the first addition followed by a Locker Room and Bar in 1946 known as the "Crying Room". Many Club identities such as "Bouncer Bill", Alf Hardley and Gordon Taylor would come down to the Club at midday to play Darts and once a month a Sportsmans night would be held playing Darts, Quoits, Snooker and Billiards. During the winter Bill Christensen manufactured a hot curry.

In 1949 President Eric Kirtlan reported at the Annual General Meeting: "the urgent necessity of rebuilding or very substantially altering and enlarging the Pavilion". Plans were drawn up to include a Supper and Social Room, however due to a rejection of Building Control approval and shortages of iron and cement, the members' aspirations were thwarted for the following two seasons.

Eventually in 1951 a contract was let to White Bros at a price of STG 1,824-6-7 to erect a new Social Room, Served and updated Lavatory accommodation. The Pavilion was successfully opened by a "Members Night" on the 15th of September 1951 and it was reported as follows:

"What a successful evening. Mr J.B. Paterson O.B.E. came to light (as he always does when needed) with a handsome President's chair. This splendid gift rounded off the handsome President's Table donated by the first year members of 1949-50. Needless to say a thoroughly good and enjoyable house warming took place."

The new extensions satisfied all members but within nine years a further change was required and approval was gained from the Auckland City Council in 1960 for extensions subject to compliance of plans with relevant bylaws.

A Special General Meeting was held on the 29th of March 1961 with 76 members in attendance to consider the following schemes:

(a) That the Pavilion be rebuilt with a steel frame construction of approximately 4,000 square feet at an estimated cost of Stg 8,000 plus.

(b) Alternatively that the present structure be extended toward the front rail and to the rear toward Rangitoto Avenue by approximately 1,500 square feet at an estimated cost of Stg 4,500.

(c) That in the event of the proposal set out as (b) above being approved, to consider whether or not a further extension for use as a Tennis Club Pavilion be made of approximately 500 square feet at an estimated additional cost of Stg 1,000.

The Meeting was unable to reach a decision on an appropriate scheme. However agreement was reached that more adequate facilities were required and a Building Committee was elected to bring down a comprehensive report for members.

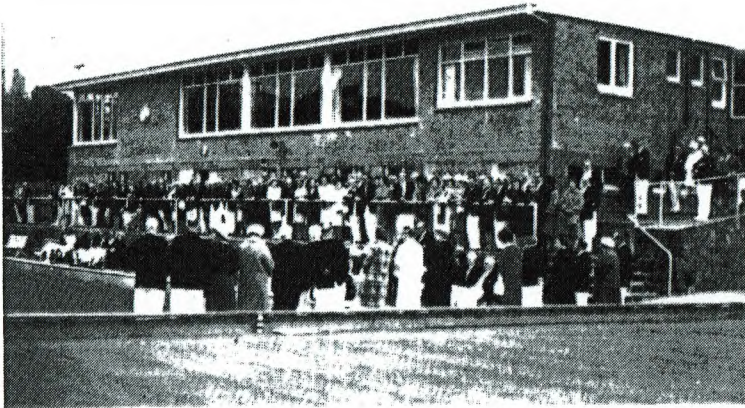


*The old Clubhouse was demolished in the early 60's. The portion left standing was moved to a site at the Auckland Grammar Rugby Club. It's still there.*

A further Special General Meeting was held on the 16th of August 1961 and approval was gained to erect a new Pavilion, incorporating basement facilities, following discussion of an Architect's Report that part of the existing building was badly infected with dry rot and that haphazard additions had produced a highly complicated roof system which had an important bearing on the cost of further additions.

A sale of the old Pavilion was made to the Grammar Old Boys Rugby Club in Ayr Street for Stg 802 and the building is still in existence today. The Building Committee took great satisfaction from this coup as the cost to demolish the structure and also an old Puriri





*The opening of the new Clubhouse in 1964.*

tree which was located on the site of the present Executive Car Park was a major expense and it was not usual to relocate buildings in those days.

It was appropriate that the new Pavilion was completed around Christmas 1963 during the year of the Club's Golden Jubilee at a cost of Stg 15,007-2-0. At the same time new furnishings were purchased for Stg 949-3-8.

In the 1963-64 season, the Club held its Golden Jubilee, completed the new Pavilion and laid down the new 'C' Green. Surely this must have been the most noteworthy year in the Club's history.

Another addition to the facilities of the Pavilion was the donation of a fine full size Billards Table by a Club member, Mr Lucas, in the 1966/67 season. For the next 20 years members gained considerable pleasure from the Table, particularly in the winter months. During the current renovations, it was decided to dismantle the Table and place it in storage.

Thirteen years after the completion of the new Pavilion, President Jim Spicer commented in a letter to members that further alterations would be desirable and called a Special Meeting on the 27th of March 1976. It was proposed to enlarge the top floor by 1,400 square feet to accommodate an increase in lounge and dining areas, to modernise the Bar and incorporate an efficient draught beer tank system. In addition it was considered appropriate to enlarge the Committee



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The total cost of the alterations including new furnishings was estimated at \$50,000 and it was proposed that a shortfall of \$16,000 be raised by offering members \$100 debentures at an interest rate of 7-1/2% p.a. repayable over four years. The Meeting overwhelmingly voted to carry out the alterations and subsequently 83 members offered loan monies totalling \$28,100.

Club members were solidly behind the project but unfortunately the neighbours were not as enthusiastic and a delay in obtaining Town Planning approval was obvious. While negotiations were proceeding it was decided to invest surplus funds with Securitibank. To the dismay of all, the City Council ruled in favour of the objecting neighbours and Securitibank went into liquidation. While the funds were eventually recovered, a second attempt ten years later to enlarge the building met with objections by neighbours and an alternative plan of modernising and refurbishing existing facilities was put into action. The extensive alterations are appropriately being completed during the 75th Jubilee of the Club and on the 25th Anniversary of the building.

The Club additionally owns a property at 24 Ara Street, Remuera which was purchased in 1947 as a Green Keepers residence for the sum of Stg 1,374-19-0. In 1971 the original villa was demolished and two flats were erected.

On the occasion of its 75th Jubilee, Rawhiti Bowling Club can be proud of its buildings which include a modern, well appointed Club House, an attractive Green Keepers residence, a spacious soil shed and solidly constructed toolshed and players toilets on 'B' Green. The facilities seem suitable for many years in the future but with regard to history, who knows what further chapters will unfold.

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## Rawhiti CC 1940



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## RAWHITI BOWLING CLUB

In 1913, the newly formed Rawhiti Bowling Club established a small centre with tennis, croquet and bowling facilities on a large site on the corner of Rangitoto Avenue and Rakau and Ara streets.

The club grew rapidly. In 1940, when bowling membership had swollen to well over 100, making Rawhiti the fourth largest club in Auckland, more space was needed. The attached croquet club, which was suffering diminished membership, was wound up and its lawns turned into bowling greens. The pavilion was enlarged in 1951 to include a large supper and social room. Twelve years later, in 1963, the Rawhiti club sold this building to Grammar Old Boys and it was removed to Ayr Street. In its place Rawhiti





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## Rawhiti BC 2010



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Rawhiti Bowling & Croquet Club 1917  
Looking NW, croquet played on bottom  
lawn



Rawhiti Bowling Club 2010  
Looking S, lawn B in foreground,  
where croquet was played