

THE AYRSHIRE BOWLING ASSOCIATION

Bowling started in Ayrshire in the 18th Century with Kilmarnock Bowling Club being the oldest, it was inaugurated in 1740, but it was not until the 1840's that most of the towns and villages in Ayrshire had a Bowling Club. This was mainly due to the intervention of Archibald, the 13th Earl of Eglinton, a great sporting gent who had enjoyed bowling in the city clubs of Edinburgh, Glasgow and London.

The Earl gave ground and help to all of the villages and towns in Ayrshire to form bowling clubs. Having done this, he then presented trophies for annual competition, the first being the Gold and Silver Bowls in 1854. These are still played for today, although in a different format than was originally intended.

In 1855 he instructed the bowlers of Ayrshire to organise a game against their Glasgow counterparts "in order to encourage the younger Ayrshire bowlers with play against their more experience opponents" - thus started the great Glasgow v Ayrshire game – and in 1857 the Earl presented 'to the bowlers of Ayrshire and Glasgow' the magnificent Eglinton Jug which is the quest of all Ayrshire clubs each year. Although numbers have risen and fallen over the last hundred and fifty-plus years the Glasgow v Ayrshire is still the biggest bowls tournament in the world. In 1895 there were 140 rinks playing (1120 bowlers) and there were no such things as phones, emails, machines to draw numbers etc. in clubs, but the Association and the postal service were very efficient in these days and bowlers were informed the very next day by postcard about where they were playing on the first Thursday in July which is the official day for the 'Great' game. In 1905 a great surge in the interest in bowling took place and there were 760 rinks playing (3040 bowlers). In 2010 there were 320 rinks playing (2560 bowlers).

The Ayrshire Bowling Association began life in 1895 as 'The Ayrshire Bowling Clubs' and kept this designation for 4 years but changed to the present name to keep in line with the newly named Glasgow Bowling Association. Ayrshire and Glasgow worked together to draw and organise the annual Glasgow v Ayrshire fixture, and this for some time seemed to be the main item of business, other than the Fours Championship, for the newly formed body.

However, in 1908, things started to change with a visit of a touring team from Canada. The Association agreed to play them and Wattfield B.C. allowed them the use of their green. The programme was 10am - meet at Ayr Railway station and drive to Burns

Cottage, 12 noon – 21 ends at Wattfield, - dinner at Kings Arms, Ayr. Ayrshire defeated the Canadians by 85-78 shots.

The Association carried on through the years adding new clubs every year'

An Australian touring team were next in 1912, and a very similar programme was followed except for travel by the new 'electric trams', which Ayr Town Council supplied free of charge and also hosted lunch. Ayrshire won by 23 shots.

In the years of the 'Great War' (1914-1918) all competitions were cancelled for the duration. The Gold and Silver Bowl game restarted in 1919 with the Glasgow v Ayrshire a year later in 1920.

The Ayrshire Cup game was started in 1921 a cup to be purchased for the winners plus £10 prize money. The cup was purchased for £48.

Australians toured again in 1922, same programme followed as before. Ayrshire won by 115 shots to 88.

Things proceeded over the next 15 years with highs and lows but with nothing notable occurring. In 1936 it was decided to start a Pairs Championship.

In 1939 the Andrew Hamilton Trophy for a County Championship competition was presented and Ayrshire entered, played Dumfriesshire in the first round, and went on to win the final and be first winners of the Trophy. The Ayrshire Singles Championship was started.

All competitive bowling was ceased during the 1939-1945 war, but in 1946 all competitions were back running. The membership of the Association was 62 clubs.

Sunday bowling was proposed but the SBA were against and it was felt that the greens needed the rest.

In 1948 the South Africans, and United States players visited the county – scores are not registered. It was agreed that dress for touring games be, white flannels, blazer, brown socks, brown shoes and brown braces!

A motion that 'any club allowing Sunday bowling be expelled from the Association' was proposed by Ardeer Rec. in 1950. This proposal was carried.

Australians toured once again and Ayrshire played them at Ayr winning 119-95 and at Kilmarnock again winning 128 -97. New Zealand toured in 1951 and, playing at Girvan Ayrshire won by 27 shots. Dinner was held in Turnberry Hotel at 12/6 (63p) per head.

Canada were the next tourists in 1952 and played at Wattfield losing by only 5 shots.

In 1957 Ayrshire won all three Scottish titles with Singles, Willie Jones (Ardrossan), Pairs, Kilmarnock B.C. and Fours, Ayr Craigie B.C.

1963, Willie Adrain (Dreghorn) won an all Ayrshire Final of the Scottish Singles Championship when he defeated Willie Smith (Galston LWM) 21-19.

1964, South Africa were the guests of Ayrshire at Troon B.C. Ayrshire won by 31 shots.

John Hershaw (Ardeer Rec.) won the SBA Singles Championship in 1965 and retained it by winning again in 1966.

USA again visited in 1967 and Ayrshire completed a 'hat-trick of wins' in the County Championships. The Andrew Hamilton Trophy staying in the county in 1965, 66, and 67.

Jock McAtee was created Ayrshire team Captain.

The Secretaries Singles Championship was started.

1969 Australian tourists again and J. McIntyre and W. Moore of Drongan won the British Isles Pairs defeating David Rhys-Jones and David Bryant in the Final.

1971 The Ayrshire Triples Championship started.

1974, Jock Fleming (Mauchline) won the Scottish Singles Championship.

In the late 1970's the Junior (Under 25) Singles, and the Senior Fours, Championships were introduced.

The 1980's saw the introduction of the Youths (Under 16) Singles and the Top Ten Championship.

1990, Ayrshire elected to have two teams playing in the Hamilton Trophy and one of the teams proceeded to win the Trophy defeating East Lothian in the final by 115-85.

In 1992 however, it was decided that Ayrshire revert back to one team as fielding two had weakened the county's bowling power. This caused quite a bit of unrest and a special meeting was held to investigate the matter.

1995, Ayrshire celebrated its centenary with games against every district, the district teams being made up from each of the clubs in that district, this meant each district had to be played three times in order to accommodate every club. Anniversary games were played against all SBA South Area Counties.

In 1999 the Scottish League for Under 25 year Olds was introduced and the Ayrshire team were the first winners of this new venture. Also in this year a decision was made to enter two teams once again in the Hamilton Trophy – one named Ayrshire and the other Ayr County. The Ayrshire team reached the Final only to be beaten by the last bowl of the game by Edinburgh & Leith.

In 2000, the Ayr County team who had acquitted themselves well in 1999, came good and won the Trophy, beating last years winners in the Semi-final and Highland in the final. This was a good way to enter the new century!

2001 was a quiet year but in 2002 Ayr County once again won the Hamilton Trophy and although qualifying for the final stages each year it was not until 2007 that Ayrshire defeated East Lothian in the Final to win the Trophy.

After coming close again with one team in 2010, it was decided to change the composition of the two teams. Instead of players for both teams being picked from clubs throughout the county, the teams would be representative of the districts that the players clubs were located. Players for the 'Ayrshire South' team would be drawn from clubs in the East and South Ayrshire Districts, and for 'Ayrshire North' from the clubs in the West and North Ayrshire Districts. We go into the 2011 competition with two new teams and expecting great success.

The main problem facing the Association is the ever increasing costs of transport, meals, etc. and in latter years we have been very fortunate to have many willing sponsors and donors. We are most grateful to them all, and the amounts given have been used wisely and prudently and the Association is able to meet all of its commitments and have a small balance left at the end of each year. Long may this continue.