

Norfolk Bowling Club Newsletter

Shining a spotlight on

Ray Lewis



Tell us a little about yourself – your background, are you from Norfolk? Your occupation past or present. Your family? Do you have other hobbies and interests outside bowls?

I am a Norwich person, born and bred in the 'Fine City'. The third of four siblings I was educated at City of Norwich Grammar School for Boys (CNS) but had the misfortune to leave just before the sixth form allowed girls to attend! After two years working for MAFF (Ministry of Fisheries and Food) I joined Colman's of Norwich (then J & J Colman Ltd.) where I spent 23 very happy years, during which I rose to the position of Company Microbiologist.

Working at Colman's gave me the opportunity to take full advantage of the social activities at the Social Club off Cricket Ground Road in Lakenham. I played football, cricket, tennis, badminton and squash and sometimes wonder how I had the energy to go to work too! After the company was sold in 1996, and my consequent redundancy, I then spread my knowledge and expertise amongst several smaller food companies throughout East Anglia in roles varying from Quality Assurance, Laboratory Management and Research and Development before hanging up my white coat and throwing the Petri dishes away.

I have always had a keen interest in diverse types of music, am a self-taught player of several stringed instruments although I am no longer able to do these justice. I enjoy the theatre - particularly music and dance, am a keen member of CAMRA (Campaign for Real Ale), Norfolk Wildlife Trust, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and Friends of Norwich

Museums. I am also involved in the administration of Norwich Bowling Association, The City Bowls League and Norwich Pensioners Bowls League (all roving-jack outdoor Federation Leagues).

When did you first begin playing bowls? What attracted you to the sport of bowls?

My introduction to bowls was at The York Tavern located on the corner of Leicester Street and York Street in Norwich. I regularly used to attend the folk club there and didn't even realise there was a bowling green at the back of the pub! Several of us watched the game being played by the 'old boys' there and asked the landlady if we might be allowed to 'have a go'. Her reply was to the effect that the bowling green was like the dart board - there for the customers to use. With strict instructions regarding footwear, and not to misbehave, we were shown a collection of old *Lignum vitae* woods, where the mats and 'cots' (jacks) were and left to get on with it. Needless to say several of us were very quickly hooked and we introduced more friends to join us and had regular practice sessions honing our new found skills!

Eventually, we approached the York Bowls Club and asked if we could join. Their response was less than favourable as they viewed us as a bunch of young 'Johnny come-latelys' and sent us away with our tails between our legs. The landlady took up our cause and suggested we form our own club and enter one of the Federation roving-jack leagues. She also suggested we call ourselves the York Rebels (which we did!). Thus began my long association with the bowling fraternity.

Which leagues and competitions have you played in? What are your highest achievements?

After progressing from novice to a relatively competent player (and asked to substitute in the York BC team occasionally!) some of the players who were also members at the Norfolk and Norwich Indoor Bowling Club invited a few of us better players to have a game on the indoor green at Unthank Road. This must have been in the early 1980s. I was soon smitten with the indoor game too and eventually was bowling in the Double Triples League, Sunday Evening Mixed Triples and later in the C Team in County League. Initially I entered as many competitions as I could but usually didn't get much further than the first round but it was all good experience and, as my game improved. I did take a few notable 'scalps' along the way. I did make the final of the Men's Singles one year but was beaten by George Scott so didn't quite make the honours board - happy days!

Have you volunteered for any roles or positions at NBC? If so, which and for how long?

During my membership I progressed from C to B teams in County League and took Vice Captaincy (B Team Captain) in 1992 and then Captaincy (A Team Captain) in 1993.

I have also held committee positions on and off throughout the years of my membership and am currently Chair of the Indoor Section Committee.

What major changes have you seen over the years?

After a few years playing at NBC, I joined the Indoor Committee as I have always felt that it is important to put something back into something you get enjoyment from. After attending several meetings, I began to realise how much the club was divided into Men's Section and Ladies' Section and a certain resentment of the ladies was evident in some of the older members of the committee. As the National Lottery was starting to be talked of, I raised the point regarding equality within the club regarding membership. If we wanted to apply for grants etc. the Club would be missing out unless both parties had equal memberships. This didn't go down very well but I do like to think that it did go some way to the beginning of

breaking down the barrier between the two sections and the eventual introduction of more mixed bowling (which only had one league on the Sunday evenings) and even more importantly more inclusion for lady members.

I have seen many changes over the years I have been involved with NBC. Among those which also stand out are the opening up of the lounge and bar area which created a much brighter area and improved viewing facilities for non-players, the installation of the wooden "Dales" floor which gave a much truer, faster bowling surface and the introduction of LED lighting which improved visibility, by giving a much more even distribution of light over the playing surface.

Tell us about an amusing incident at NBC

Over many years of playing one incident sticks in my mind which may prove a cautionary tale to others. My brother and I drove to Diss one evening for a National Pairs match. After a competitive but friendly game (which we unfortunately lost) we adjourned to the bar and swapped a couple of drinks and enjoyed a good chat with our opponents. Eventually we decided we had better leave and get ourselves back to Norwich before the club at Unthank Road closed. So, after saying goodbyes, and wishing our opponents well in the next round, we drove back to NBC. On arrival back at NBC, we opened the car boot to discover we had forgotten to retrieve our bowls bags from the Diss changing room and the following day had to make the return trip to rescue our bowls. Certainly put some mileage in for that match!

Many thanks to Ray for sharing his thoughts and memories.