

Woodstock Bowls & Tennis - 70 years of sport

This year is the 70th anniversary of the Woodstock Bowls and Tennis Club which is situated in Cadogan Park. Woodstock is lucky to have this facility on land which the Town Council generously leases to the Club for a peppercorn rent.

My memories of the Club go back to 1943. This was during the war when there was severe rationing. My friends and I - we were all about ten years old - somehow acquired rackets. These had wooden frames and natural gut strings and had to be kept in a press: weighing between 11 and 13 ounces and with adult grips it was a wonder that we could get our hands round them. But these rackets and a string bag of old, grey balls were our pride and joy! To start with we played tennis in the afternoons, after school - the only adults seemed to be farmers' wives from around Woodstock and I remember Mrs Hunt, Mrs Bampton and Mrs Venville who were all able to motor in to Woodstock using the farmer's petrol ration. All our fours were a mixture of adults and juniors although in 1945 we had a Junior Tournament (Boys and Girls) which I won - I still have a silver cup donated by Kate Lester (the late Mrs Kate Young).

Things changed after the end of the war. A lot of fit young men became members after they had been demobbed. The car park filled up with cars that had been laid up "for the duration" - they had all been lovingly cleaned and serviced after 6 years disuse - and the courts became busy in the evenings. The pattern of play was still everyone, adults and juniors, mixing in together. Life in general was beginning to get more exciting. There was a Horse Show and Gymkhana in the Park, a small intimate affair nothing like the present Blenheim Horse Trials: it was held at China Corner and Tennis Club members volunteered to do the stewarding.

The Bowls Section was also flourishing. During the war its members were largely the professional and businessmen in the town. I remember the Town Clerk, many Town Councillors and some of the local Magistrates playing regularly. After the War came social changes, some of which caused the Bowls club members to suck their teeth in - some new tennis members, who had learned to play to a very good standard in the Forces, had in their youth often appeared before the local Magistrates' Court!

In 1951, I went off to Teacher Training College and pursued a working life away from Woodstock. I rejoined the Club in 1993. There had been enormous changes! A fourth Tennis Court had been added, the Clubhouse had been rebuilt and the field bordering the courts which once had ponies grazing on it was now covered in houses.

Now, in 2009, changes are happening faster than at any time in the Club's history. It has to keep abreast with new and more demanding legislation, the membership is wider and wants more out of the Club and the premises have suffered break-ins and vandalism. Running the Club is a demanding task and those who volunteer to serve on the various Committees deserve our gratitude. But the Club is in good heart to face the next 70 years and to provide a place where members can enjoy both social and competitive games and where Junior Members can be encouraged to reach their full potential.

Lorna Clifford