



HISTORY OF THE WODONGA BOWLING CLUB INC

THE CLUB'S HISTORICAL TIME LINE

1925

July 28th:

Seven Wodonga citizens meet to discuss forming a bowling club.

September 9th:

A "representative group" of residents meet to formally constitute the Wodonga Bowling Club. Percy Lingford elected president and Edward William Owens elected secretary.

Lingford announces that earlier that day Wodonga Shire Council approved application for use of council land on the corner of Hovell and Osborne Streets for establishment of bowling green at one shilling per year rental.

October 17th:

Work commences on the formation of the green - Stan Condon turns the first sod.

1926

September 14th:

First Annual General Meeting held. Percy Lingford tenders resignation as moving to Rutherglen. Mick Martin elected president and Eddie Owens secretary.

October 23rd:

Wodonga Bowling Club opened by Percy Lingford. Mabel Martin throws the first kitty and Kathleen Lingford rolls the first bowl.

1927

January 14:

Eddie Owens tenders resignation as moving to Tasmania. W. H. Hodgson requested by committee to act as secretary/treasurer.

November 16th:

Wodonga Bowling Club affiliates with Victorian Bowls Association.

1928

1929

October 23rd:

Wodonga Bowling club admitted (provided they play three rinks) to the Ovens and Murray Bowling Association.

1931

October 14th:

Mick Martin, Wodonga Bowling Club president, elected President Ovens and Murray Bowls Association.

1935-36:

Bob McCullough wins Ovens and Murray Bowls Association Champion of Champions.

1936

Purchased new electric mower to replace the motorised one that had been giving them trouble for ten years. Wang played them at Wodonga and Trounced them. The Sentinel reported the greens were cut shorter than previously and as a result a considerable number of bowls went into the ditch.

1938-39

Stan Condon wins Ovens and Murray Bowls Association Champion of Champions.

1939

Two rinks added to green. Club looking forward to 39-40 season and great expectations of increased membership. However, with the outbreak of war and the difficulties of travel the club experienced little growth.

1949

August 22nd:

Associate (Ladies) Branch of the club constituted. Doll Connell elected president and May Hicks elected secretary.

1954

Second green (now named Mahony Green) constructed.

1961

February 25th:

Gwen Green wins the Ladies' State Singles Championship.

1962

Surplus army hut purchased and moved from Bonegilla for use as clubhouse. Had inside running because one of club members worked at the army.

1968

1969

Liquor licence granted. First manager, Bill Sumner, appointed.

1970

Dunstan Green constructed.

1972

October 29th.

Dunstan Green officially opened

1975

Club advertised for a qualified green keeper. 3 applicants applied for the position.

Keith Anderson - a wheat farmer from Ouyen who arrived in Wodonga 3 years previously volunteered his services.

Keith was a very private man with a blunt no-nonsense attitude to life.

The committee placed their faith in him and was well rewarded. His innate knowledge of

the soil compensated for any lack of formal qualifications. His introduction of Tif Dwarf grass to the greens was the turning point in the club's fortunes. Since then the quality of the greens has been unsurpassed.

Keith retired at the end of 1986 and was succeeded by David Swasbrick.

1977

Keith Anderson and Swasi and crew go to Ganmain and collect grassclippings

1978

April 16th:

Present clubhouse opened by RVBA (Acting) President, Hunter Beattie.

1979-2015

To be included in due course.



THE EARLY DAYS

By the early 1920s all major towns neighbouring Wodonga had well established bowling clubs. Beechworth and Rutherglen clubs for example were founded before the turn of the century but Wodonga Bowling Club was not formed until 1925.

It may well be, however, that bowls was played in Wodonga as early as 1870. An early edition of the Border Mail informs readers that a Mrs Caroline Pearce arrived in Australia in 1860 and after working for ten years for a landowner in Barnawartha “moved to a house near the bowling greens in the small township of Wodonga.” Caroline Pearce later took up property in Beechworth Road and still later Pearce Street was named after her.

Long time member and former vice-president and greenkeeper of Wodonga Bowling Club, David Swasbrick Snr., has long believed that a cleared area just off Pearce Street near Beechworth Road could well have been a bowling green in the very early days of settlement in Wodonga. We know this site was in close proximity to where Caroline Pearce resided which gives some credence to the view that indeed there was a bowling green situated there so many years ago. Unfortunately this area is now built on. As yet research has not located any evidence indicating the existence of a Wodonga Bowling Club prior to 1925 but it is quite possible that a local landowner may have built his own greens for private use.

In the twenties Wodonga was a “railway town” and a “cattle town”. Different rail gauges between states meant that interstate passengers, goods and livestock had to be transhipped at the border. Under an arrangement between states passengers and general goods were transhipped at Albury and livestock at Wodonga. The manpower required for this task together with the high number carriage cleaners and train drivers required meant that the Victorian Railways was Wodonga’s biggest employer. Having reputedly the biggest cattle markets in the state, if not the country, meant large numbers of cattle were railed to other parts of the country which in turn also provided employment for many.

But Wodonga was not a wealthy town nor, by today’s standards, particularly progressive. It lived in the shadow of Albury and more often than not was ungraciously referred to as “Struggle Town”, particularly by Albury residents. The town, however, was the home of many successful sporting teams - football, rifle shooting, tennis, croquet, cricket etc. but the town did not provide the opportunity for residents to play bowls.

The formation of a bowling club was the subject of a great deal of discussion over many years and two of the town’s leading citizens, Shire Engineer Percy Lingford and Mick Martin (later Shire President) were leading proponents. However, their motives for the establishment of a club may to some degree differed.

Active in community affairs Martin was a local grazier with a deep love of horses, most sports and a good argument. Most of all he was an ardent bowler who played at surrounding clubs. Martin felt strongly that he, and other residents of Wodonga, were being deprived by not being able to pursue his favourite sport in his hometown. He believed Wodonga was big enough to support a successful bowling club arguing that as the town achieved success at other sports they should be able to do likewise at bowls.

Lingford on the other hand, although enjoying bowls was not as committed to the game as Martin. As Shire Engineer he was undoubtedly Wodonga's most influential citizen. Involved in most community activities, president of the racing club, sitting on the bench as a JP he was highly respected and also very persuasive. Conscious of the need for the town to be progressive Lingford saw the establishment of a bowling club as a positive step towards making life "brighter and better for the community" and believed a bowling club would enhance the town in general.



Despite the support of these two eminent citizens, and many others, positive steps to form a bowling club were not taken until towards the end of 1924 when Edward William Owens arrived in town to take up a position as a printer with the local newspaper, *The Wodonga and Towong Sentinel*.

An energetic character, Owens had previous experience in administration of sporting clubs and was a person who enthusiastically threw himself into any task he undertook. Before coming to Wodonga he had also played bowls. On his arrival he was quick to observe that while the town had many successful sporting teams the town lacked a bowling club - a view consistently expressed by Martin. Extremely community minded Owens felt the best way for him to provide a service to the town was to channel his energies into the formation of such a club.

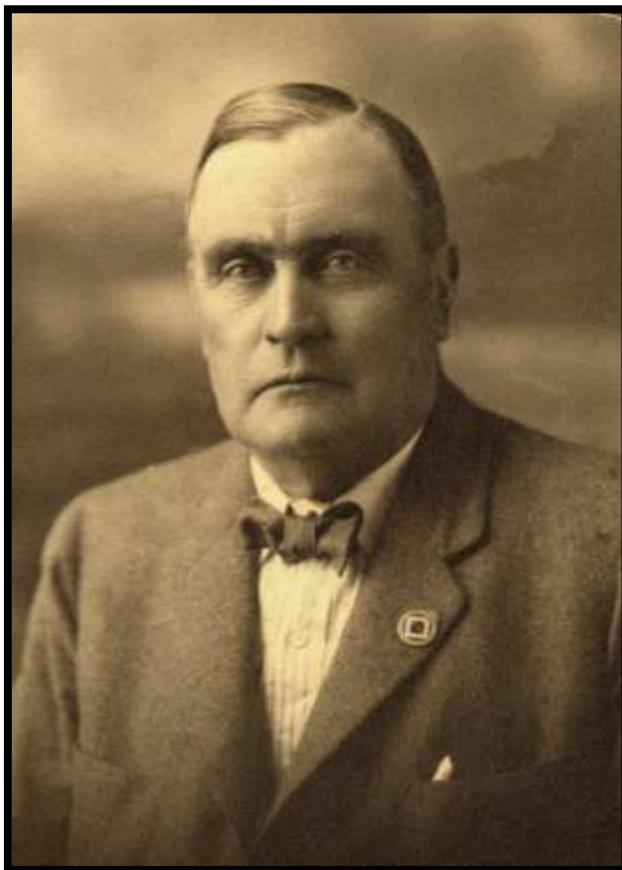
Owens was just the person Lingford and Martin were looking for and for them his arrival in town could not have come at a better time. Not only was he a hard worker he was also astute. He realised that as a newcomer to the town to achieve success in the establishment of a bowling club as well as the support of Lingford and Martin he required the support of the town's other leading citizens. But with Lingford and Martin working with him the support of other "professional" people and members of the Shire Council came quickly.

On the evening of 28th July 1925 seven interested residents met at the council chambers with the aim of establishing a bowling club. Shire President Bill Twomey chaired the meeting and others in attendance were, Percy Lingford, Duncan Jamieson (Manager: Bank of Victoria), Pat Dunne (Manager: Bank of New South Wales), Ted Barnes (Postmaster), Mick Martin and Eddie Owens.

Lingford expressed regret at the small attendance but stated that this should not be a reason to allow the proposal to lapse. He suggested that a small committee be appointed to canvas the town and district to ascertain the feeling of people toward establishing a bowling club. Owens proposed that those present form themselves into a committee to arrange for another meeting whereby those who attended could “thoroughly go into the matter.”

Owens had obviously not been idle. He conveyed to the meeting that arrangements could be made with the trustees of the Methodist Church to lease a piece of their land in Church Street adjoining the croquet lawn and indicated that a meeting of the trustees was to be held at an early date when the matter would be discussed. He pointed out that if the church ground were available it would enable the bowling, croquet and tennis clubs to have the one caretaker to attend the three sites.

Mick Martin said he had no doubts about the ultimate success of the proposal and



stated that although he had little knowledge of the site under discussion he believed it would suit splendidly. It appears Martin was not overly concerned where a bowling club was situated as long as the town had a club. He further expressed the opinion that if an estimate was made of the possible expenditure associated with the proposal they would have something tangible to place before the next meeting.

The suggestion to detail an estimate of associated costs before the next meeting was supported by all. Both bank managers, Jamieson and Dunne, stressed that in order estimates were realistic it was important to determine the number of rinks they were aiming to construct and also the ongoing cost of maintenance. Lingford responded by stating he understood that it would cost approximately £100 to lay down a three rink green.

Before the meeting closed Eddie Owens was appointed acting secretary with the others in attendance agreeing to act as an interim committee.

On Wednesday September 9th 1925,

A representative gathering of citizens attended a meeting at the council chambers held with the view to forming a bowling club in Wodonga.¹

Percy Lingford chaired this second meeting and informed those present that as a result of an application made to council by the interim committee, earlier that day approval had been given for use of a section of land on council's reserve in Hovell Street for the establishment of a bowling green at a nominal rental of one shilling per annum.

As council's chief adviser it can be assumed that Lingford played no small part in gaining this very generous arrangement for the proposed bowling club. Certainly paying a nominal rental for then council land, which the club still occupies, would be seen as preferable to leasing land from the Methodist Church.

Eddie Owens then stated that he had secured a "treatise on the construction and maintenance of bowling greens from the Victorian Bowling Association, which should prove useful"² and as the land had definitely been made available he hoped to see an early start made with the construction of greens.

The club was then formally constituted and office bearers elected. Percy Lingford was elected president, Eddie Owens hon. secretary/treasurer and Mick Martin, Vic Teese and Arthur Beard committeemen.

On the motion of Percy Lingford, it was voted: "That members' subscriptions for the first year, commencing October 1, 1925, and ending September 30, 1926 be £2/2/0."³ It can be assumed that even in the very early days decisions were made prior to meetings for Duncan Jamieson in sending a written apology for his unavoidable absence enclosed a £2/2/0 cheque for membership.

Although the country was yet to face the great depression of the thirties when it is considered that the average weekly wage in Australia in 1924 was £4/15/5⁴ it can be seen that the initial membership fee, £2/2/0, was relatively high which may have deterred many citizens from seeking membership. Moreover, at that formative time members would gain very little for their outlay and in reality the membership fee may be seen as a donation. Nevertheless, a statement of the financial position of the club presented to a general meeting held on Tuesday 27th April 1926 showed membership fees had generated £90/6/0 indicating that membership in the first year was 43.⁵

¹ Morning Border Mail, 11th September 1925.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Official Year Book, Commonwealth of Australia, No 18, 1925, p570.

⁵ Wodonga and Towong Sentinel, 30th April 1926.

Inaugural members were enthusiastic and keen to get on with the construction of the greens. Percy Lingford had prepared plans and levels and although only a four rink green was constructed an area sufficient for a six-rink green, a pavilion and conveniences and surrounding shrubbery was to be fenced off. The designated site was seen by many as ideal with the Sentinel reporting:

The soil is mostly sandy loam, which will greatly facilitate the drainage of the green. The distant hills and rustic scenery lend a soft, pleasing aspect, which, together with the fact that the main thoroughfare through the town is only a short distance off, makes the site most satisfactory for the purpose for which it has been set aside.⁶

Council was particularly supportive of the project expressing the view that a bowling green with surrounding shrubbery would present a more pleasing view to passing train travellers than an undeveloped waste area, which in turn would create a more favourable impression of the town of Wodonga in general.

But the project was not without its detractors and more than a few members of the community expressed the view that the venture was doomed to failure. Some were critical of the chosen site for the Hovell Street reserve was always considered low lying with some parts frequently under water and was used in the main as a stock holding area. The site the current scout hall occupies in Reid Street was then a public sheep dip and sheep were often held on the reserve before dipping. Drovers would also hold sheep there overnight before loading them on trains for transport to Newmarket. Sometimes cattle would also be held there before being taken to local markets.

The area set aside for the bowling club was the highest section of the Hovell Street reserve and despite the controversy surrounding the choice of site a group of enthusiastic members met on the morning of Saturday 17th October 1925 to begin the formation of the greens. Because of the squally and unsettled weather work did not commence until the afternoon.

Stan Condon is credited with turning the first sod having lent a single furrow plough for the task. Mick Martin lent two horses and also a man in charge. Alf Wilson brought along his double furrowed plough, three horses and a scoop. Vic Teese, Jim Flower, Arthur Beard and Eddie Owens assisted with Percy Lingford supervising. Mrs Lingford, Mrs R. Ryan and Jim Sealey⁷ provided afternoon tea. By the end of the day, despite the poor start, all were delighted with the work accomplished.

By February the club had spent £100 but it was estimated that that amount again was saved by the working bees held over the summer months with excellent progress made on the preparation of a four-rink green parallel to Hovell Street which forms part of the Ellwood Green today. The Sentinel reported,

An area sufficient for six rinks has been fenced substantially, and over 200 loads of soil, suitable for the building of four rinks, has been carted and placed in position, surrounded by 6 x 1 kerbing. Water pipes have been laid at the cost of the piping only, the trenches being dug by the working-bee and all connections being made by Mr. Hodge. Levels again had to be taken and pegs placed over the ground to carry the leveller,

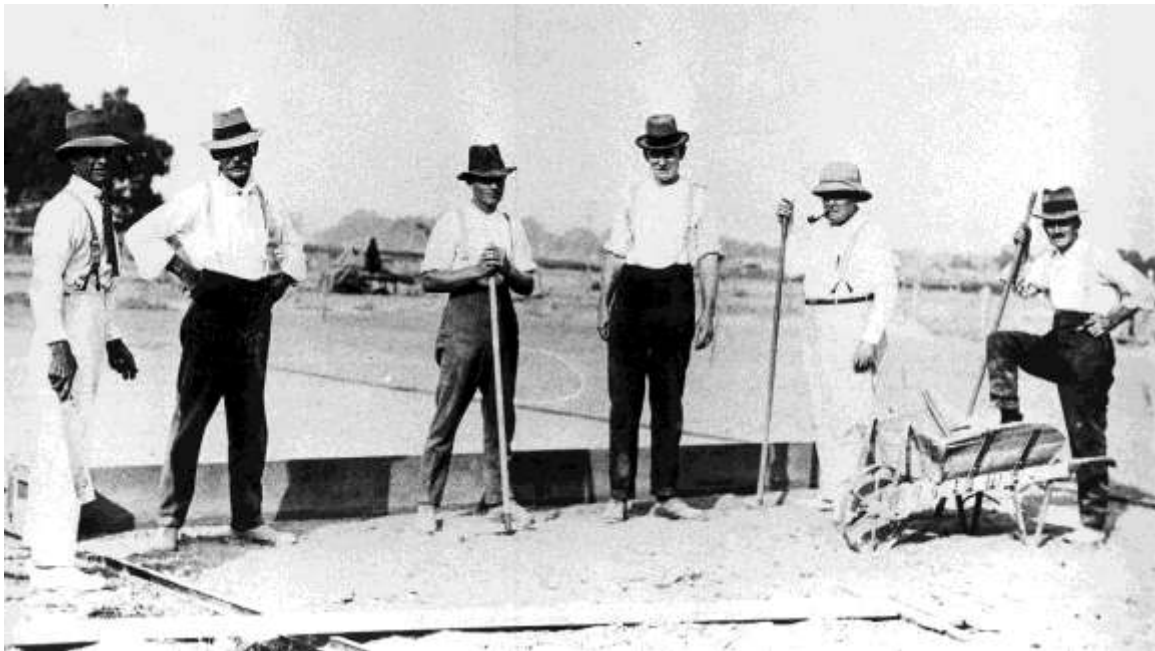
⁶ Wodonga and Towong Sentinel, 23rd October 1925.

⁷ Proprietor of the Carrier Arms Hotel.

which has made preparation for couch seed planting. The planting has been held up on account of the dry season now being experienced. Had the weather proved favourable, it was hoped to have the rinks ready for a few games at Easter, but it will not now be possible to open the rinks for play before next bowling season which commences in October. However, the delay has given the committee more time to go thoroughly into detail concerning the

*formation, and it is expected that the bowling green will be one of the finest in the district when completed.*⁸

Percy Lingford continued to assist with the surveying and the general supervision of the work and many other volunteers also toiled superbly. The committee was also extremely pleased with the help offered by outside clubs and in particular with the assistance given by the Albury Bowling Club. They loaned a green leveller and one of its members, Mr Gollasch, spent considerable time helping and demonstrating the working of this appliance. Mr Fellows, Municipal Curator from Albury, also gave valued advice on the sowing of the green.



**CONSTRUCTING ORIGINAL FOUR RINKS – 1925
A. WILSON, M. MARTIN, J. STREET, S. CONDON, P. LINGFORD,
F. LAMBOURNE.**

By the end of the summer of 1926 great progress had been made with the formation of the green and members were looking forward to the opening later in the year. While volunteer labour had minimised costs of the construction of the greens the club had expended most of its total receipts, which by April had amounted to £142,⁹ on the materials and the cost and cartage of nearly 200 dray loads of soil.

⁸ Wodonga and Towong Sentinel, 5th February 1926.

⁹ The croquet club ran fund raising evenings to support the establishment of the bowling club and contributed much of the amount over and above that derived from membership fees.

The committee was anxious to be debt free by the official opening but at the April General Meeting Percy Lingford detailed the expenses likely to be incurred erecting fencing, building a pavilion and planting hedges and shade trees and other improvements. While a working bee was organised for the planting of hedges and shade trees the club was reluctant to proceed with the building of a pavilion until costs and other details were determined.

As usual secretary Owens, had not been idle and reported he had interviewed three young ladies, Miss E. Lambert, (Queen of Sport), Miss D. Curran, (Queen of Railways) and Miss L. King (Queen of Business), all of whom were willing to participate in a queen carnival to raise funds for the club.

In the twenties and thirties queen carnivals were a very popular method of raising funds for clubs and organisations. Contestants in the Wodonga carnival sought votes from members of the public at threepence a vote with the contestant gaining the most votes, ie, raising the most money, being declared Queen of Wodonga. Contestants organised various fund-raising functions, dances, concerts, euchre parties, afternoon teas, etc with the final amount raised, £161/4/4, far exceeding the expectation of the committee and more than doubling income so far raised by the club.

The carnival culminated in a "Brilliant Crowning Ceremony"¹⁰ with Miss Lucy King, 6109 votes, raising £76/7/2½ being crowned Queen of Wodonga. Miss Lambert with 4308 votes raised £53/15/7½ and Miss Hollister with 2186 votes £31/1/6.

The club was now in a relatively strong financial position and, using voluntary labour, proceeded with the construction of the pavilion¹¹ between the green and Hovell Street.¹² Timber was purchased from Stan Condon who ran a small timber yard not far from the club. The building was marked out and cut out on one day and erected the next. With their newfound funds the club also purchased a motor mower which came up by rail from Melbourne. The initial excitement this purchase created deminished rapidly for it never ceased to give trouble until they replaced it a decade later.

The first Annual General Meeting was held on Tuesday 14th September 1926. The secretary reported the club's bank balance was £56/19/2 and that the audited statement of assets and liabilities indicated assets exceeded liabilities by £190/10/9. This was a remarkable effort for a club that had only been constituted twelve months previously.

At this meeting Percy Lingford tendered his resignation as president explaining he had accepted a position with Rutherglen Shire Council and would be moving to

¹⁰ As it reflects societal attitudes and behaviour of the time the full report of this ceremony published in the Sentinel 23rd July 1926 makes particularly interesting reading. See Addendum I.

¹¹ At the first AGM the secretary was instructed to convey the thanks of the club to Messrs, Harford, Harford jun., Swain, Wolf, Condon and Condon jun. for their valuable assistance in the erection of the pavilion. Condon jun. is Ernie Condon, now in his nineties, who still lives diagonally opposite the club.

¹² Later, as two new rinks were added to the green the pavilion was shifted closer to Hovell Street. Still later as the club expanded and new clubrooms were build, the pavilion was shifted to where it now stands as the greenkeeper's workshop and storage shed.

reside in that town.¹³ Mick Martin and many others expressed regret at Percy's departure and later in the meeting he was unanimously elected the club's first life member for his great service to the club in the relatively short time it had been in existence. The club also honoured him by requesting he open the greens on Saturday 23rd October 1926. Mick Martin was then elected the new president, a position he held for the next 22 years, and Eddie Owens once again elected secretary/treasurer.

The opening was a grand event with many dignitaries, visitors, members, clergymen and local citizens in attendance. There was no shortage of orators.

President Mick Martin welcomed all in attendance and introduced Percy Lingford who expressed great pleasure at being asked to perform the opening. He then went on to say, "It was hard for those not directly associated with the movement to appreciate the trials and tribulations and the adverse criticism that the committee had to contend with. There are many who are ever willing to pour cold water on any movement inaugurated to make the idle moments of life a little more pleasant. However, all these troubles have been overcome and in my opinion bowling is a most enjoyable recreation, and the finest thing that is known for cementing together the brotherhood of man."¹⁴ He paid tribute to the untiring energy and zeal of the secretary, Eddie Owens, and stated that without his efforts it was doubtful that the club would ever have got off the ground

Lingford then presented a flag in the club's colours of navy blue with a white border and white W.B.C. in the centre to Owens and asked him to hoist it. Owens in turn presented Lingford with a club life membership badge in recognition of his services to the club. In acknowledging the presentation, Lingford said that while he appreciated this marked method of recognition he felt there were others more deserving. "When the temperature was well over one hundred degrees there were many who worked manfully and devoted much of their time in the interest of the club."¹⁵

The President's wife, Mabel Martin, was invited to throw the first jack and Lingford's wife, Kathleen, given the honour of rolling first bowl. Lingford then declared the greens open and invited all present, the ladies in particular, to participate in a game of bowls.

¹³ Percy and his wife were given a public farewell on 18th October 1926. See Addendum 2: Percy Lingford.

¹⁴ Border Morning Mail, 25th October 1926.

¹⁵ Ibid.



KATHLEEN LINGFORD ROLLS THE FIRST BOWL

23rd October 1926

(Standing behind: Mick Martin, Mabel Martin and Percy Lingford.)

During afternoon tea many visitors congratulated the club and wished them every success. Member of the Legislative Assembly, Harold Beardmore, complimented the club in the way it had overcome many difficulties and Shire President Charlie Pollard said that outstanding progress had been made and members of the club deserved every credit for the way they had worked.

Archdeacon Potter, President of the Wodonga Progress Association, expressed pleasant surprise at the number in attendance and moved a most hearty vote of thanks to the ladies for the kind assistance that afternoon. Representatives of a number of visiting clubs spoke, accepting invitations to visit in the future and offering assistance to the club whenever it was required.

All who attended voted the afternoon a great success. Committee members were optimistic for the future of the club and the many members who had worked so hard over the previous twelve months looked forward to many enjoyable hours on the green.

Percy Lingford and Eddie Owens were quietly satisfied with what they had achieved in a relatively short time with Owens realising that the work had only just begun.

Mick Martin was delighted. He could at last play bowls in his own hometown.

POSTSCRIPT

Despite the enthusiasm and hard work of members and officials the first two seasons for Wodonga Bowling Club were disappointing. Harsh weather conditions over summer months made establishing a green to a suitable standard difficult. So much so that during this time invitations to play at Wodonga were not extended to other clubs.

The club affiliated with the Victorian Bowling Association on 16th November 1927 and was admitted to the Ovens & Murray Bowling Association on 23rd October 1929 – “provided that they play three rinks.”

Mick Martin was elected as a Shire Councillor in September 1929 and became Shire President in 1930. He was again Shire President 1938-39. In 1931 he was elected President of the Ovens & Murray Bowling Association, a position he was elected to again in 1939. He continued to serve as club President until 1948. He died in June 1950, aged 81, and is buried at Barnawartha.

Percy Lingford, after leaving Wodonga continued to reside in Rutherglen until his death in 1934 aged 70 years. He is buried in Rutherglen. While employed by Rutherglen Shire Council he continued to work as Shire Engineer for the Shire of Chiltern on a part-time basis.

Eddie Owens resigned as Secretary/Treasurer of Wodonga Bowling Club on 12th January 1927 leaving Wodonga to take up a position in Tasmania with the *Launceston Telegraph*. Nothing is known of his movements after his departure just as there is little known of his life before arriving in Wodonga. At a surprise presentation evening held for him before his departure many speakers spoke of him in glowing terms and referred to the outstanding contribution he had made to the town in the establishment of a bowling club. It was voted that he be made a life member of the club and be presented with a suitably inscribed badge
