

BOWLS and more BOWLS!

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Many of us have sat watching our peers and elders enjoying the game of Bowls, I was intrigued to understand the game and the people that participate in what I thought was a very English game. My research reveals it is anything but, the game is universal and widely followed by all ages.

Bowls historians believe that the game developed from the Egyptians. One of their pastimes was to play skittles with round stones. This has been determined based on artefacts found in tombs dating circa 5,000 B.C.

The sport spread across the world and took on a variety of forms, Bocce (Italian), Bolla (Saxon), Bolle (Danish), Boules (French) and Ula Miaka (Polynesian). The oldest Bowls green still played on is in Southampton, England where records show that the green has been in operation since 1299 A.D. There are other claims of greens being in use before that time, but these are, as yet, unsubstantiated

Certainly the most famous story in lawn bowls is with Sir Frances Drake and the Spanish Armada. On July 18, 1588, Drake was involved in a game at Plymouth Hoe when he was notified that the Spanish Armada were approaching. His immortalised response was that "We still have time to finish the game and to thrash the Spaniards, too." He then proceeded to finish the match which he lost before embarking on the fight with the Armada which he won. Whether this famous story really took place has been heavily debated.

Image above shows antique set of wooden bowls. Just visible on the front of the box is the inscription "Slazengers 1902 Lawn Bowls". Image below is that famous scene from Plymouth Hoe.



King Henry VIII was also a lawn bowler. However, he banned the game for those who were not wealthy or "well to do" because "Bowyers, Fletchers, Stringers and Arrowhead makers" were spending more time at recreational events such as bowls instead of practising their trade. Henry VIII requested that anybody who wished to keep a green pay a fee of 100 pounds. However, the green could only be used for private play and he forbade anyone to "play at any bowle or bowles in open space out of his own garden or orchard".

King James I issued a publication called "The Book of Sports" and, although he condemned football (soccer) and golf, he encouraged the play of bowls. In 1845, the ban was lifted, and people were again allowed to play bowls and other games of skill.

The earliest documented use of the word 'Jack' in Bowls is from 1611 "*Was there euer man had such lucke? when I kist the lacke vpon an vp-cast, to be hit away?*". It appears that Jack in some contexts meant a slightly smaller version of something - in this case a 'Jack-Bowl', later shortened to 'Jack'. In 1697 R. Pierce wrote "*He had not Strength to throw the Jack-Bowl half over the Green*".

Old English Bowling

There is still a league in South East Hampshire that plays an what they claim is the old version of Lawn Bowls. The woods used are a minimum of Jaques No 6 Bias and have to end up within four feet of the jack to score. The clubs in the league are at Titchfield, Gosport (Alverstoke Old English Bowling Club), Portsmouth, Havant, Hayling Island, Emsworth and Bosham.

Lawn Bowls

The English Bowling Association was founded in 1903 and it is very well organised sport which hosts numerous competitions from the club to the national level. The sport is most popular in the South of England with thousands of devotees. Because success doesn't require physical fitness, it is particularly favoured by older folk but there are a lot of younger players, too. As with many English sports, Lawn Bowls spread to the the British colonies from the 1600s onwards. Lawn Bowls was first played in North America in the early 1600's in the United States. Records show that President George Washington played bowls on his estate. In Canada, the sport was introduced around 1730 at Port Royal in Nova Scotia. In Australia, bowls first was played in Sandy Bay, Tasmania in 1844. The game appeared in New Zealand sometime during the 30 years after that. The World Bowling Board (WBB) is responsible for the standardisation of rules across the world, and is charged with the task of encouraging the growth of the game world-wide.

Lawn Bowls is usually played straight up and down a lawn. In "Singles", each player has four bowls called "woods" (although these days, 90% of bowls are made from a resin material) which are rolled alternately at a