

Merseyside, Derbyshire, Staffordshire, Lancashire, Shropshire, Warwick & Worcester, Greater Manchester, Cheshire, North Midlands, Potteries & District (South Staffordshire), N.Lancs & Fylde, Cumbria, Wales, South Yorkshire, Yorkshire.

As well as Wales, the sport is played in Scotland, Ireland and the Isle of Man. The first officially organised international happened in 1995 between Wales and England and the following year, the inaugural International tournament was staged in the County Association of North Lancs & Fylde. This competition took the four teams from England, combined Scotland/Ireland, Wales and the Isle of Man. The first competition was won by England, while in the 1999 tournament, the combined Scottish/Irish team were victorious.



Short Mat Bowls

When winter comes around, Bowls like many outdoor games, become less easy to play. So indoor variations of the game have come into existence. One popular variety is called simply Indoor Bowls and is essentially Lawn Bowls played on an indoor surface with the majority of the rules consistent with that game. However, another variant called Short Mat Bowls, with characteristics all of its own, has a really big following all over Britain and Ireland. Like many pub games, it is really a miniaturised version of the outdoor game to enable it to be played more easily indoors. It is played on a mat measuring 40-45 x 6 feet with full-size bowls, the mat being easily rolled up and put away for convenience. There is a ditch but this is simply an area marked at the end of the mat and to compensate for the shorter distance an intimidating block is placed in the centre of the mat. This makes it impossible for a bowler to aim a fast straight bowl at the jack area - all bowls must use the bias to curl around the block to their target.

The short mat bowls game was first played in South Wales by two South Africans who came to work in the area. They had played bowls outdoors in South Africa

and, perhaps due to the poor climate and the long close season in this country, they began to play a simulation of the outdoor game on a strip of carpet in a church hall. Some time later, they moved to Northern Ireland and took the new game with them. Rules and conditions of play were drawn up and the game soon became well established in the Province. It was introduced into England by Irish expatriates, but development was slow until the 1980's when its potential as a low cost sport for people of all ages was realised. The English Short Mat Bowling Association (ESMBA) was formed in 1984, and is now the governing body of the sport in England.

Table Bowls

Other variants such as carpet bowls and indoor bowls have been popular at one time or another. The best known indoor version of Bowls is a pub game that appeared around the district of Carlisle called Table Bowls. In this game a miniature set of bowls and jack are played on a standard 12 x 6 feet Billiards or Snooker table. The bowls and jack are rolled down a wooden chute which is placed slanting on the table edge with one end on the table. No impetus is allowed to be given to the bowls - it is purely the angle of the chute and how far up it the bowl starts that determines its final position.



The set above is an antique Table Bowls set made by Jaques of London. Age is estimated at 1890.

Rolle Bolle

Rolle Bolle was developed by Belgians, around the time of the Reformation, somewhat a cross between horseshoes and bowlings. It is played on hard packed sand, with stakes set 30 feet apart. Teams try to roll the beveled, hard rubber Bolle so that it stays closest to the stake.

Rolle Bolles are made of a hi-tech hard rubber substance that is virtually indestructible. The bolles are shaped like a small wheel that is beveled on one edge causing it to roll on the path of an arc. The size of a bolle ranges from a minimum of six inches to a maximum of eight inches in diameter and weighs a maximum of eight and a half pounds. The bolles are two and a half inches thick.

If you want to give Bowls a try, check it out on-line - there's a wealth of information available.