

THE MOVE TO SUFFOLK SQUARE

By 1917 dissatisfaction with the existing conditions was building up. The Winter Garden green (according to the "*Looker on*" of November 17th) was condemned because of (i) "the uneven character of its surface" and (ii) "the publicity". The article continued, —"New members from Southampton and Taunton declared that bowlers who have never played outside Gloucestershire do not know what a properly prepared green is. Many would-be members who declined to play on a space so open to the public were lost. (The membership was then 65). Furthermore it was desirable to increase the number of bowling greens not associated with drinking houses".

So went the discussion at the annual general meeting at the Belle Vue Hotel on Friday, November 9th. However, the minutes record that, after Mr. Alfred T. Ivens had been elected as president, Mr. E. D. Ricketts (the re-elected secretary and currently County champion) introduced the committee's scheme for providing a new green at Suffolk Square on a piece of land about 50 yards square. The idea was approved and trustees were appointed to carry out the purchase. As so often happens when the mind is made up, opportunities are either made or present themselves. Indeed things began to move rapidly.

It was only a week after this decision that the committee heard that Mrs. Phelps — the widow of a former member — offered to give a piece of land in Hatherley Road, the only condition being that it should be called the "Iowa" Bowling Green. It would be necessary however to purchase a strip of adjoining land to make a full-sized green.

A further two weeks elapsed before the committee was told of an offer by Lt. Col. J. T. Ashburner to give £500 for the purchase of the land at Suffolk Square on the following conditions: (i) that interest on this sum should be paid to him during his lifetime, (ii) that the green should bear his name, and (iii) that the money be used for the purpose of purchasing the land in

Suffolk Square to be laid out as a bowling green.

A special general meeting was held at the Belle Vue Hotel 5 days later (on December 5th, 1917). The relative merits of the two proposals were discussed and a proposition to accept Col. Ashburner's gift for the Suffolk Square scheme was unanimously carried with acclamation.

Wartime.

It would be difficult to imagine a more unlikely year in which to plan a great new venture than 1917, a year of unrestricted submarine warfare and of dreadful land battles. In total contrast, it would be impossible to pick a committee more likely to succeed. Alfred T. Ivens, the president (a local solicitor whose name still heads the title of a local practice), understood the intricacies of setting up a trust. Edward D. Ricketts, the secretary, must have been known to almost every business and professional man in town. Then there was George Straw who — together with his wife Annie — owned the Home Field which was then the name of the land in Suffolk Square. In addition there were other prominent local business and professional men.

Naming Ashburne Bowling Green.

Completion of the purchase of the Home Field took place early in January 1918 and became Ashburne Bowling Green, the permanent home of the Cheltenham Bowling Club. It was at Colonel Ashburner's suggestion that the final 'r' in his name

was omitted. He said that ashes are not usually burnt and the occupation of an ash burner is neither useful nor purposeful so he did not wish to attach a clumsy or senseless appellation to the new ground. Did he do less than justice to his name? Someone had to burn the vegetable matter to make the ash to get the potash for use in making glass and soap. However, several weeks later at the formal opening, he said that his name derived from the Danish Ashborner but that Ashburne was much more euphonious.

The next bold step was to cancel the club's agreement with the Borough Council to hire a green at a rent of £10. This meant that they were totally committed to making in four months a bowling green on land used for garden produce, with several fruit and other trees. Sales of holly trees, mulberries, apples, pears and currant and gooseberry bushes formed part of the club's income. Some of the borders were also let as garden allotments.

DEVELOPING ASHBURNE BOWLING GREEN

(1) A temporary green.

The strategy was to lay a temporary green on the North-West corner for play in the 1918 season. Then there would be a permanent green at the North-Eastern end with a pavilion on the East. More time for the work was gained by arranging all the early matches of the season on opponents' greens.

Enthusiasm was so great that the secretary, Mr. Edward D. Ricketts, with his brother Alfred and members of the committee were on the site on the Sunday morning following the acquisition of the land, to start the work of clearing up ready for leveling. One contractor wanted £107, which the club could not afford, and two others could not find any labour because of the war. A local groundsman was given the job with what help he could get. He was paid £17 and his helper £15. In March the secretary reported that the turf laying had cost £31. 3s. 10d. The club's first tools, including a wheelbarrow, were bought from the vendor of the land for £19. 10s. 0d.

One month before the opening, competitions were already planned and the prize money subscribed by members of the committee.

When Col. Ashburner consented to open the green at 5 p.m. on Saturday, May 11th, 1918, he wished the ceremony to be as quiet as possible "owing to the very serious times we were passing through". The opening took the form of a scratch match between members, after the Colonel threw the first jack and he and Sir James Agg-Gardner, M.P., had bowled the first woods.

The first "pavilion" consisted of a second-hand building which had served as a pay-box at Montpellier Gardens. The owner wanted £15 for it and the club agreed to buy it (for less if possible) and to provide a lavatory, drain and water at a total estimated cost of £50. In 1919 this accommodation was supplemented by a tent donated by the president, Col. Ash-burner.

(2) Permanent green No. 1.

In September 1919 arrangements were made for Mr. Henderson, greenkeeper of the North London Bowling Club to advise on laying a Cumberland turf green. He agreed to carry out the work for £500, but defaulted. The job was given instead to Mr. Rae of Cardiff at a much higher cost, and he was informed "that he is not to take any suggestions from anyone except Mr. Prew who would give all orders".

Col. Ashburner was invited to perform a ceremonial laying of the last turf and the green was opened on 26th. June 1920. The colonel welcomed Mr. T. Woof, president of the English Bowling Association, who bowled the first wood. The team opposing the club consisted of one E.B.A. rink and others representing the county. In the evening there was a celebration dinner at Georges restaurant.

(3) Permanent Green No 2

Tenders for laying the second permanent green — to replace the original temporary one — were considered in October 1922, including one from Mr. A. Fisher of Victoria bowling club, Weston-super-Mare. However once again Mr. Rae of Cardiff was selected to carry out the work and the green was opened on 28th April 1923 by the president, Sir James Agg-Gardner, M.P. The match was between the captain's team and that of Mr. H. Unwin, vice-president.

So the club now had two full sized green and a pavilion but there were still difficulties to be overcome, of which the most protracted was a satisfactory water supply. In addition furnishings and additional accommodation for winter and other social activities were required.