

## **Gift of the land by Lt. Col. F. J. Ashburner.**

When the idea of buying land for one green only at Suffolk Square was first mooted, the intention was to arrange a building society mortgage of £225 costing an annual payment of £21 for 16 years. But that was for the land only, leaving more than as much again to be found for leveling and turfing. Such was the enthusiasm for the idea that the committee had already raised £100 and, when the secretary went round with a list, members promised another £66. However Col. Ashburner's generosity enabled the club to purchase the whole site. He was closely identified with many aspects of the life of the town. Besides being a director of the Theatre and Opera House Company, he was active in much charitable work including the hospital. His second marriage in 1917, after being widowed, was to Viscountess Maidstone who gave the "Maidstone Cup" to the club for the championship competition. She died in 1931. and he was 85 when he died in January 1934.

Then came an unforeseen embarrassment. Because his £500 was on loan it did not become a gift until his death, so that the club had to pay succession duty. There was also a legacy of £100. It was arranged to pay the (unrecorded) duty by installments of which the first was over £30.

## **Money for the greens.**

The interest on Col. Ashburner's loan (at 5% p.a.) was £25, already 24 times the rent that would have been paid at the Winter Gardens. Members were invited to subscribe capital for the development costs secured by debentures in £5 units carrying interest at 5%. Repayment was by a periodical draw made by the committee as the club's circumstances permitted.

In retrospect it seems strange that such a body of experienced business and professional men should choose this method since the capital produced no income apart from a temporary investment pending payment to the contractors. Obviously the membership subscriptions had to cover the annual interest paid to themselves (plus repayments to those lucky in the draw). The officers had the onerous job of registering the debentures and transfers, and sending out merest warrants. Lawyers came off best with their extra work on deceased members' estates.

When the Surveyor of Taxes asked for a return of the bar profits the bank account was already overdrawn (a chronic condition) and the treasurer was instructed to defer interest payments.

Some investors asked for their annual subscriptions to be taken out of their bonds; others offered them as donations to new appeals, but had to be told that the cash was not available until the bonds were drawn for repayment. Bonds that were surrendered for cancellation, however, were gratefully accepted by the committee and some were bought back at a discount.

Yet the debenture scheme succeeded in raising the necessary capital where possibly an appeal for donations might have failed. It may be that the speculative element in the debentures was more attractive than the finality of an outright gift, particularly as the £750 capital required was a formidable sum in the monetary value of 1919.

However, Mr. Unwin's later example eventually changed the pattern of fund raising, first to loans free of interest and then to unconditional donations.

### **More good fortune, H. Unwin's gift.**

One founder member had already donated a magnificent sum for the land and now a second benefactor made a present of the handsome pavilion. The final cost is not recorded but the minutes show that the lowest tender was £779, enough to buy a contemporary 4 bedroom detached house, reduced by omissions to £570.

Mr. Herbert Unwin, who paid the bill, was a man of many business interests including a colliery and a brewery at Sheffield. When he first came to this district in 1896 he lived at Dowdeswell Court, moving in 1904 to Arle Court, now the head office of the Dowty Group. His services to charities were many and munificent. He died in 1925 aged 83, three years after giving the pavilion, and is remembered for the cup which he donated for members who have not previously won a competition.

### **Money for No. 2 green.**

In September 1922 the committee considered a suggestion that the second permanent green might be financed by issuing invitations for further capital. However, the treasurer, Mr. Alfred Ricketts failed to see how the club could find 5% interest on further subscribed capital and said that any money lent for the new green should be free of interest.

Mr. H. Unwin had already offered £100 free of interest if the other £400 was found by members by December 31st. His example had a profound effect on members and most of the existing debenture holders agreed to forego their interest payments. New subscribers (in units of £5) were given a "bond" which, in effect, was merely a simple acknowledgment of the loan free of interest until repaid. Bank overdraft facilities were also arranged subject to finding six guarantors. Meanwhile there had been numerous gifts of money and tools, materials and articles supplied at bare cost by business members.

#### **(1) Pavilion extension, C. Dickins' gift.**

In 1927, thanks to the generosity of Mr. C. Dickins, the club was presented with an extension to the Unwin pavilion. Charles Oscar Dickins started his tobacco business in High Street in about 1889 which eventually grew into the group in Kingsditch Lane with a multi-million pound turnover. His sporting activities were many and he played bowls in Canada in 1923. He was president of Cheltenham Bowling Club for two years prior to his death at the age of 69 in 1936.

His gift to the club was a room for those supplying teas, a kitchen with a cooker, and a ladies' cloakroom.

#### **(2) Re-laying No. 2 green, T. Boulton's gift.**

There was great dissatisfaction with No. 2 green at the end of the 1928 season. It had been used for six years and it was decided to have it re-laid by the firm of Maxwell Hart to their specification at a cost of £475. So as to avoid a charge on club funds Mr. T. D. Boulton gave £400 and a member agreed to pay the balance.

Thomas Dutson Boulton was a member of the once famous Cheltenham firm of R. L. Boulton & Sons who employed 40 men in their stone-masonry and woodcarving departments. He had previously given 20 chairs for the Unwin pavilion and had almost completed his fourth year as president when he died at the age of 73 in August 1932, having been on the green the night before. At that time the No. 2 green was known as the Boulton green.

The widowed Mrs. Boulton donated £100 to the club in 1941.

### **(3) Billiard room extension.**

In 1936, nine years after the kitchen extension, it was decided to submit plans and consult the Ladies' College authorities about a further addition to the pavilion to accommodate two billiard tables. Tenders were invited and the contract for the building (of timber and thatch to match the original Unwin pavilion) was awarded to E. T. Stinchcombe & Sons. The whole scheme, estimated to cost £650, was financed initially by bank overdraft. Until the overdraft was cleared it was not possible to undertake further development. In any case, the outbreak of the second World War in 1939 made it difficult even to maintain the grounds and buildings. Blackout curtains had to be bought, away matches were cancelled because of petrol shortage, the ground suffered through lack of adequate efficient labour and as there was no money for roses the borders were planted with potatoes instead.

Ten years after the War, in 1955, a further extension to the Eastern side of the pavilion (on similar lines to the billiard-room on the West) was considered. Hitherto drainage had been into a septic tank system and it would be essential for the drains to be connected to the main sewer. This was done later by agreement between the Cheltenham Old People's Housing Society, owners of Faithfull House, and the club trustees. The inclusive cost of the whole scheme was estimated at £1500 and on the 19<sup>th</sup>. May Mr. Stinchcombe was asked to proceed. However, fate decided otherwise.

### **Re-building, Tom Stinchcombe's gift.**

It was decided that re-building would be more advantageous than reinstatement. A sub-committee was appointed under the chairmanship of Mr. L. C. Flood. With the benefit of experience in the existing building they were able to plan the best use of the space. The gable end to the roof over the main entrance facing the green was suggested by Mr. Irwin (former County Architect) to complement the gables at either end of the facing terrace of houses on the Northern side of Suffolk Square.

Mr. T. Stinchcombe, who had been prevented by the fire from building the timber extension, was now given the job of pulling down the Unwin pavilion and completely rebuilding it with an extension on both East and West sides. In place of timber the fabric is now of brickwork faced with prefabricated Cotswold stone. The major part of the cost of rebuilding and refurnishing was recovered from the insurers. The new extension was financed from members' donations in excess of £1,000 and from reserves plus a temporary borrowing of £1,000. In 1965 it was reported that the total outlay was in excess of £7,000 of which £4,800 was paid to the builder to cover his original estimate. However Tom Stinchcombe had carried out work far beyond his obligations under the tender, amounting to £1,775, the cost of which he bore himself. The members expressed their sincere thanks and later emphasized their gratitude by the gift of a gold watch, for which they subscribed. He has been a life member since 1956. Such was his regard for the club that it seemed he could never do enough and new entrance gates in 1958 were merely one example of his many and varied donations.

The foundation stone was laid by the Mayor on 8th October 1955 and it conceals a complete set of coinage and a match fixture list for the year.

## **(7) The reckoning.**

Apart from some minor additions and improvements, the enlarged pavilion in 1956 marked the end of the development of Ashburne Bowling Green that had started 38 years earlier. All this had been achieved without forming the limited company which had been envisaged by the pioneers who drafted the trust deeds in 1918. Instead members managed to supplement their subscriptions for current expenses by loans and gifts for capital schemes, with bank overdrafts to tide over the worst periods. Indeed one unorthodox entry in the minutes of 1941 is worth quoting — "The treasurer gave the committee a pleasant surprise by coming out of his O.D. dismal to O.K. credit". This was the first favourable balance since 1936.

However, there still remained scope for consolidation and improvements. At the annual general meeting in 1964 it was reported that the paths and cur park were in poor condition, that the heating system needed renewing, and that internal and external maintenance of the premises was necessary. The greens, which had been unsatisfactory for many years, were still causing dissatisfaction. Accordingly, the meeting authorised the trustees to mortgage the club's assets to secure a further overdraft.

## **SECRETARY'S UPDATE**

We hope to bring this section of our history up to date but in the meantime we should remember and thank those member's who have bequeathed substantial sums of money to the club in recent years. These are:

**2012 Alex Bradley (c£200K)** a long serving traditional member and sometimes irascible lead bowler whose picture hangs above the Ladies Honours Board;

**2013 Joan and Dennis Kirkby (c£25K).** Dennis was a staunch member of the club who spent hours tending the gardens surrounding the greens. Some of the money has been used to enhance our grounds which form a lasting memory of Joan & Dennis.

**2023 Ralph Crisp (c£10K).** Ralph was Club President 2010 & 2011 and Club Captain 2009. A good club bowler for many years and one of life's gentlemen.