

Bowls Lancashire

Lancashire Ladies History up to 2007

In 1971 nine ladies from three Clubs (Blackpool, Heaton Hall and Southport) became a 'steering committee' and founded the Lancashire County Women's Bowling Association. The Association was welcomed as an affiliated member of the EWBA on 22nd May 1971. In a letter to Ivy, the EWBA Hon. Secretary, Mrs D.Ellis, advised that 'cost of entry to County winners into the National Championships was 2 new pence per entry' and 'a County hatband is necessary for those coming to Wimbledon to distinguish various Counties'.

In that first year Lancashire ran competitions in Singles, pairs and triples and a total of 29 competitors took part. Finals were held at Southport and the event was reported in 'Bowls News' and the 'Middleton Advertiser' and 'Southpo

In 1972 the County played it's first 'Inter County' event. An article in the Southport Visitor reported that the 'Lancs Ladies had shone in defeat against experienced Cumberland opponents'. Both teams were accorded a civic reception by Southport Corporation and the report in the Southport Visitor was accompanied by a picture of players and officials.

1973 saw the County enter the Stella Logan league. They managed a win against Durham! Unfortunately they lost all their other matches. Ivy notes 'had great difficulty in finding enough players'. Despite this the LCWBA won their first round Johns Trophy by 1 shot against Cumberland, but then lost their second round against Yorkshire by 15 shots.

The EWBA visited in 1974. This historic occasion was celebrated by a Civic Reception given by Southport Corporation. A photograph and report in the Southport Visitor shows the teams, officials and Alderman and Mrs Langley greeting the players. The EWBA President, Mrs Winifred Buttery attended the joint LCBA/LCWBA Presentation Dinner held at the Royal Hotel, Southport. The County withdrew from the Stella Logan competition. The Finals were again held at Southport and a photograph of the finalists with President Mrs Jean Miller appeared in the Southport Visitor under the banner headline 'Blackpool's golden smile in the Finals!' Blackpool made a clean sweep of the honours in the four finals played in 'strong, sometimes gale force winds'.

In 1975 total number of entries into County Competitions had risen to 107. The EWBA President, Mrs Violet Doyle attended the Association's dinner and the County lost both first round games in the Johns and the Double Rink.

The following year saw the County again without success in the Johns or Double Rinks. The Blackpool Four of Gladys Marlow, Edith Moore, Adele Jones and Margaret Gibson lit up the County as bright as the illuminations near their Club when they clinched the National Fours title! I wonder what skip Gladys thought of the newspaper report which described her as 'super skip, cannonball Gladys Marlow!' This must have been a really exciting final- Gladys and Co were 7-0 up, 12-2 up, 17-12 up and then found themselves at 19 across on the penultimate end and 4 down in the head! Gladys's last bowl resulted in a six shot swing from 4 down to 2 up! They eventually won 22-19. The newspaper clipping describes it as a 'fine match'!

Gladys and Co won the County title again in 1977 spoiling Heaton Hall's party. Ladies from Heaton Hall won the other 3 County titles at Finals Day at Southport.

In 1978, 114 entries in total were received for National Competitions. Ivy, in her report to the AGM said she was 'amazed to see some ladies not wearing official dress at County functions' and she was 'giving warning that in the future she will have no hesitation in asking any player improperly dressed to leave the green' and this also 'applied to the wearing of hats'! By 1980, the County managed to get a total of 204 entries into County Championships thus ensuring both winners and runners up could go to the National Finals. This was a huge milestone for our small County. The team again lost in the Johns but the eight of Baines, Smith, Blackmore, Pilkington

and Mills, McLoughlin, Gibson and Martin had a tremendous run in the Double Rinks Walker Cup. Wins against Cumbria, Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire saw them reach the National semi finals at Birmingham against Cambridgeshire. Neither the newspaper article nor Ivy's book records the score. Ivy has just entered the word 'Lost' and I think this reflects her obvious disappointment at not managing to make it to the Final!

1983 was Ivy's Presidential year.. We again sent both Winners and Runners Up to Leamington. Ivy and her husband donated a new County flag to the County and an Umpires Kit was bought! Mrs Flegg, EWBA President attended the County Dinner.

However, Ivy starts her AGM report with 'what has been a very sad year for me' and thanks everyone for their support. She does not elaborate but then goes on to say 'programmes and badges for competitors at the National Championships are free , (not before time). Brown sandal type shoes with heels may be worn with uniform'. Her 1984 report was her fourteenth as County Secretary and she mentions that the season was 'blessed with beautiful weather which wasn't reflected in the County's bowling'. Two years later despite the County attaining 271 entries into competitions we only were allowed to send our winners to the National Championships.

Ivy's 1987 report spared no one! The weather had been awful, County Finals had been re scheduled and the re arranged day was bitterly cold. Players in the Johns trophy were given a ticking off - 'I was appalled to see some players eating their sandwiches on the green. It was lucky for them I was playing on another rink'. Even the President was given one of Ivy's infamous tongue lashings! 'We didn't see the President as often as we would have liked at representative games. It was a pity that pique at non selection should have sometimes over ridden pride in the position as President of the County – it perhaps gives us food for thought in future nominations for that position'. (I shall leave it to you to work out who this unfortunate President was..suffice to say that those of you who knew them both will well remember both personalities!)

Ivy however mellowed somewhat towards the end of her report when she welcomed Newton Hall as the fifth affiliated member of the Association. But true to form she then spoilt it by declaring that 'No synthetic greens are to be used for County competitions'!

Ivy's eighteenth report in 1988 again mentions the bad summer weather. It also mentions 'a season which seemed to be dominated by a seasoned skip blatantly ignoring the rules. I put this down to her state of health at the time – but the final straw was when another member of the rink took it upon herself to remonstrate with her Club for a decision made by the County executive'! Unfortunately, she doesn't tell us who the 'seasoned skip' was or give us any diagnosis as to the illness! There is also mention of her 'disgust with the treatment of the LCWBA at the County Dinner where 'even though there was a longer than usual top table there was only one LCWBA representative thereon. The other spaces filled by Northern County Presidents and sponsors'. This was the final year the two Associations held joint Presentation Dinners.

In 1989 she obviously had crossed swords with the Men's Association during the season. She was 'mortified that Blackpool had had to drop out of the County Cup and it is time to put our own County first and stopped cow towing to the Men's Association or Men's Clubs. No one could have been more pleased than me at their success in the Middleton Cup - after all I have spent my married life with their failure'!!!! Another comment 'the last minute arrangements of other associations should come second to ours'. It appears that some of the ladies had dared to go and support their husbands at the National Middleton Cup Finals and were therefore unavailable for the County Cup! The County fours runners up (M.Powell, M.Mallinson, L.Fitzmaurice, A.Colbourne) cheered Ivy up however. They made it to the quarter finals at Leamington but Ivy was disappointed there 'weren't more folk from Lancashire there to cheer them on – it was nearly as bad as no officials from Durham to support Norma Shaw when she won the Pairs'!

Much success at Leamington for the LCWBA is recorded in 1990. The County Triples Winners (L.Hunt, V.Holloway, C.Swan - Bolton) made it to the quarter finals as did Blackpool's pair of Giles and Thompson. Arlene Colbourne lost in the 4 wood semi final.

The County re joined the Northern County Stella Logan league in 1992 and in 1993 a new County Flag was donated by Pat and John Barker.

National titles had been scarce since 1975 but in 1994 Irene Howlett and Caroline Swan won the National Mixed Fours title with Gordon Niven and David Lockhart. The Association voted for the wearing of red blazers with their County Uniform and celebrated its 25th Anniversary in 1996 with a game against the EWBA at Southport.

At the 1997 AGM, Ivy announced her retirement, effective from the end of the 1998 season. Her old adversary, Alice Boothroyd, sent her off in style by making it to the National quarter final of the 2 wood!

In 1999 Viv Tomlinson won the National Mixed Pairs with Alec Atkinson and Viv with Joyce Bristow, Alec Atkinson and Fergus Muat were National Mixed Fours Runners up in 2002. Janet Cropper flew the Lancashire Flag at Leamington in 2004 and became the National 2 wood runner up and in 2007 Janet Cropper and Evelyn Franklin became the National Over 55 Pairs Champions.

Ivy was the LCWBA Founder County Secretary and held the post for an amazing 26 years.

She passed away on 11th August 2000.

I am sure she would have been proud of 'her' County and it's achievements.

As we close this chapter on the County's bowling history and look forward to a new future as Bowls Lancashire, it is only right that we remember Ivy and the other 8 ladies who founded the Association in 1971.

We are indebted to them.