

MARKET OVERTON BOWLS CLUB

HISTORY

Bowling in the village of Market Overton goes back a very long way. While there was not a permanent green for many years, Market Overton contains some really large and rather beautiful homes, all within a 'stones throw' of the current permanent site, and this enabled the bowlers to always have somewhere to play.

In 1945 as part of the VE celebrations, the government of the day encouraged parishes throughout the country to organise entertainment at home, this was to prove the foundation for many sporting organisations.

Various activities are on the poster but no bowling!!

Market Overton Bowls Club was founded 1945



Prior to the purchase of the current green the bowlers used the grounds of The Old Hall, a listed building, and at one time home of the Wingfield family, landowners and Rectors, and latterly home to Lt Colonel Heber Percy who was gracious enough to permit use of the gardens.



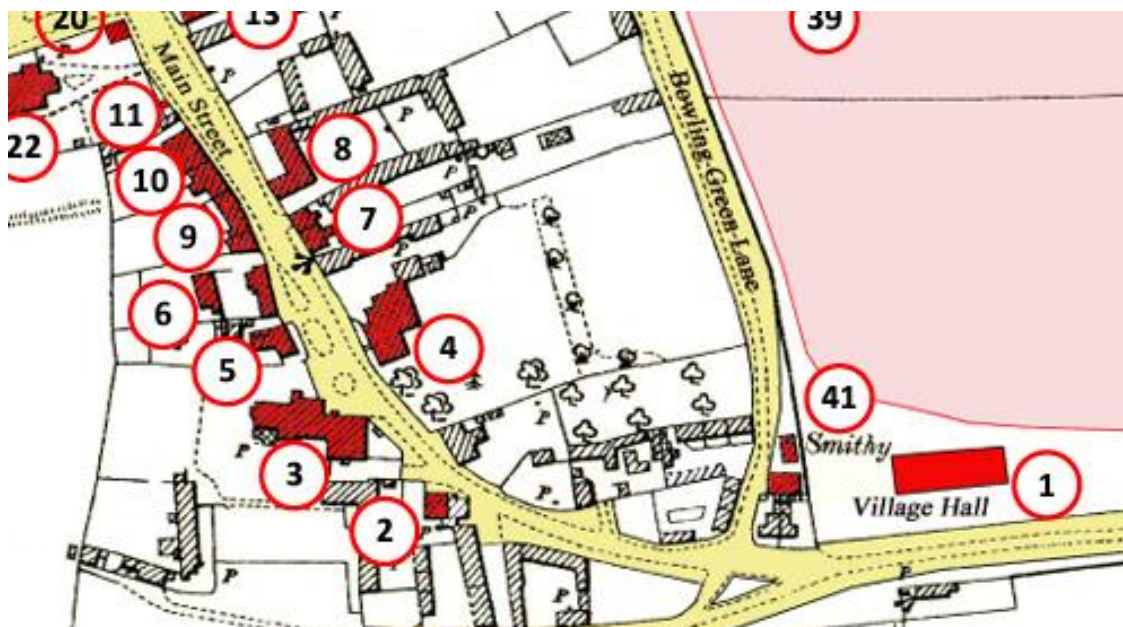
The Old Hall, Main Street, Market Overton

The garden of Market Overton House, below, which is another listed building, [see map on page 3], extends from Main Street to Bowling Green Lane. The boundary stone wall used to have access points into what is now named Bowling Green Lane but then was referred to as 'Back Alley'. These can still be seen although blocked off. Before the current green was formed bowlers played here using the tennis courts and lawns. Colonel Mackay James was in residence.

Billy Elsey was a butcher at 46 Main Street and there was a slaughterhouse, now demolished. The land at the rear of all these properties stretched back to Back Alley. It was open, agricultural land plus a dairy farm. All available to the bowlers. Now there are new homes both sides of the road making the original space hard to imagine.



Market Overton House, Main Street [4 on map]



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The Rectory [listed building]

Canon Frederick Charles Macdonald was the Rector from 1945 to 1960 at the Market Overton church and was a keen bowler, so it was understandable that he would offer his gardens as a bowling green



1940's?

Left to right: Jack Allan, Dick Anyan, Tim Ireland, Ted Bradshaw,
Frank Kettle, Johnnie Bell,

This is just a small number of the bowlers of the era; Len Gibson, the village cobbler,
was also a keen bowler as were many others who would have been playing
on another day

This photo is thought to have been taken in the Market Overton House garden tennis courts

Many years later the courts were covered with an artificial surface and surrounded by a
high wire tennis enclosure

The Atkinson Family

The benefactor of the Club was born in the village. His name was Alfred Atkinson, born 8th October 1885, in Number 50 Main Street, Market Overton, where he lived for many years. His home was one of a pair of cottages next to the current Village Hall. The village hall was not built until 1902..



Above photo 50 Main Street, Market Overton, home of Alfred Atkinson
– right hand of pair of cottages on the corner of Bowling Green Lane, next to Village Hall

Alfred's parents were William Atkinson [born app 1837] and Anne Atkinson [nee Tomblin]. Anne was born in 1844 in Market Overton . The Tomblin family were shoemakers and lived in the cottage next door to Market Overton House on Main Street. Anne married William on 11 April 1871. She died at the age of 87 in July 1931 and is buried in Market Overton churchyard as we assume is her husband William.

Alfred's siblings were - Emma, Sarah, Louisa, John, William, Anne, Charles and George, making Alfred the baby of the family.

By the age of 15, the Census records reveal that Alfred's mother was already a widow at the early age of 57. The family were still at the same address in the village with just Alfred's older brother William at home, [described as a domestic coachman], together with sister Anne, and Alfred, a wheelright and carpenter. When Alfred was 19 years of age he married Ethel Annie Glitheroe in July 1905 in Wigan, Lancashire..

In 1911, aged 26, Alfred was a family man, living with wife Ethel, his two daughters Violet and Ivy in 17 Burghley Houses, Stamford and working as a carpenter. The houses where they lived were built in 1901 off Ryhall Road, Stamford and it seems built for the workers at Blackstone's engineering works. Evidently they were quite desirable as they had 5 rooms and were high rents."During 1911 and 1916 the houses were renumbered so that No 1 became no 39 and all the houses were given odd numbers ending with No 40 in 1911 becoming 117....." Alfred and Ethel had five children in all Jack, William and Daisy following on after Violet and Ivy.



Burghley Houses, Stamford, home of Alfred Atkinson and his family c 1911

Brother William remained in the village and married Naomi. The floral theme continues as they had a daughter named Iris. At the time of writing I am unable to confirm if William remained living in No 50. However we do know more about him and his interest in bowling from the tribute at his funeral in 1956 which took place in Market Overton Church,

"he lived in Market Overton all his life, apart from the 1914-18 war. He took a great interest in village affairs and was a member of the church choir for over 50 years. He had 28 medals for first aid and was a member of the British Legion, Mens Club and Bowls Club."

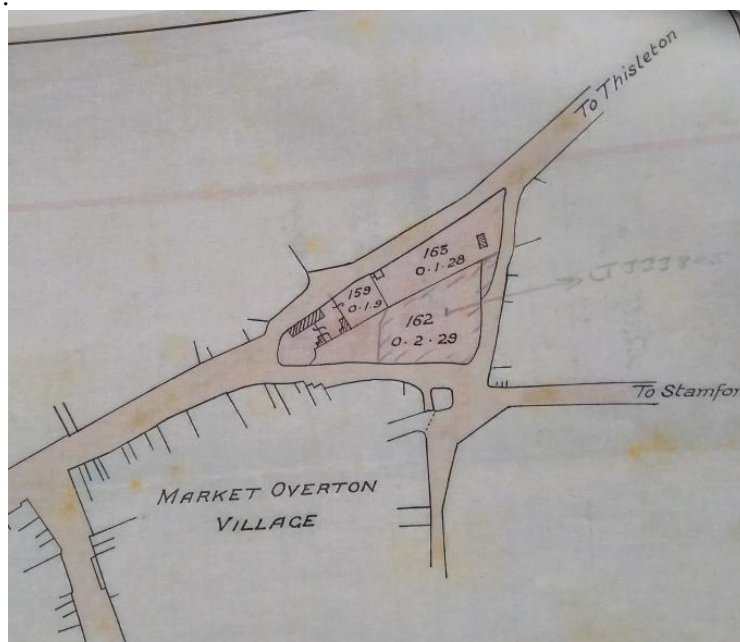


William and Naomi's gravestone in 2023

William Atkinson's funeral was conducted by Canon MacDonald who was to become the first President of the Club in 1960. At the organ was Mr Norman Buckley, F.R.C.O. another club member. [see photo page 8], Naomi Atkinson was buried in Market Overton church in 1969 aged 87 years. Another brother John who was living in Cottesmore was buried aged 51 also in the Market Overton Churchyard. William's daughter Iris Atkinson was married in Market Overton Church to Rev. Philip New in 1938.

The Purchase Of The Land 1922-1946

In **1922** Lt Col John Maurice Wingfield who lived in Tickencote Hall, sold the land plots 159, 162 and 163 on the ordnance plan in Market Overton, including a couple of cottages to Mr Frederick Skillington for £105. The land we now know as the bowling green is plot No 162. The Deed for this transaction was witnessed by Frank Graham, the butler.



Plots 159,162 and 163

Frederick Skillington lived in the drapers shop in the village, originally with his parents and sister, before taking over the business himself from father George, around 1911 with his wife Ethel and is referred to as a 'draper and clothier'.



**1 Main Street, 1904 [Jack Hart collection]
Home of Frederick Skillington, now the community village shop**

Their home/business at 1 Main Street is currently the community shop. This must have been a thriving concern at the time as also employed as an apprentice was Vere Whittle. Sadly he and his brother Owen, a policeman, both lost their lives in WW1 and are buried in the churchyard..



above: The modern day community shop

In **1946**, i.e. 13 years later, by which time Frederick Skillington was 70 years of age and Alfred Atkinson 61 years, all three plots 159, 162 and 163 were sold for the princely sum of £120 by Mr Frederick Skillington to Alfred Atkinson. Although this included the 'bowls green' one assumes this was also a business venture.

At the time of the purchase Alfred Atkinson was living at 42 Dartford Road, Leicester with wife Ethel and daughter Violet Hasselby who on the census return describes her occupation as a coach trimmer [motor vehicles] and she was now married to Roy Hasselby.

Meanwhile Frederick Skillington was in residence at 60 Westwood Park Road, Peterborough and died there in 1939.

The remaining Plots 159 and 163 were sold and developed over the years with modern homes that overlook the bowling green; presumably the land had been bought with this purpose in mind.

1948



above - 1948 Market Overton v Leicester team [original photo in the club house]

Left to right 1-6. 7 to 15, 16 to 21

Alfred [Bill] Atkinson is No 10,
his daughter Violet is in the front with her husband first on the left both playing for the Leicester opponents.

The remaining Market Overton bowlers are Albert Pick, Mr Buckley [music teacher],
Arthur Gibson [saddler], Joe Mills,
Canon F.C. MacDonald [with the tie], Frances 'Franny' Kettle, Ernie Preston, George Clow, George Downs,
George Pick, Wally Hudson [village baker], mostly village residents and some working for the Iron company
and living nearby

Many of the names above are on the honours board at the club as Presidents or other officials

Fund raising

Buying the land was only the first step, a lot of finance and planning and physical work was required to convert the ground into a bowling green. Initially the aim was to provide three rinks.



20th March 1953

Alfred died 9th January 1960 aged 75 years, 14 years after his purchase. He was living at 25 Park Hill Drive, Aylestone, Leicester and was referred to as a 'retired motor body builder'.

In his will he bequeathed the land which he referred to as 'his bowling green' [plot 162] initially to his wife Ethel Annie on trust for her lifetime and then to the Bowls Club. Ethel died at 412 Aylestone Road, Leicester 11th December 1969, at which time the green was passed on to the Club.



Plot 162 The bowls green

There was just one request from Alfred that the Club should pay £1 per year to the 'Church Expenses Fund'. This token has been paid up to 2050.

Sometimes Mr Atkinson is referred to as 'Alf' and other times as 'Bill'. It is obvious he stayed true to his roots in Market Overton throughout his lifetime. He obviously had a real affection for the village and Church, having so many members of his direct family living in Market Overton. This would explain his request for the club to support the 'Church Expenses Fund'.



St Peter & St Paul, Market Overton Church

Fund raising continued. Fetes and similar occasions were arranged to create opportunities to raise money to cover the expenses of the project..

WHEN **March** **Evening** **Howling Club** raised £57 by a fete in the Rectory gardens on Saturday. The above won the over 11 years class in the fancy dress parade: 2 Ian White (Mile stone Inspector) 1 Philip Walker (football results) and 3 Anthony Shaw (clown).

Other class results: Six years and under: 1 Rosemary Harne (Rainbow), 2 Mary (Birthday girl), 3 Kevin Baxter (Wee Willie Winkie). Six-11: 1 Wendy Baxter (Sunshine breakfast), 2 Pat Goulton (Pirate), 3 Marlene Dalby Mrs. Gilks, who was intro (Red Riding Hood).

The fete was opened by duced by Dr. Nowik, president of the **Howling Club**, who distributed the prizes.

Judges for the fancy dress competition were Mrs. Gilks and Mrs. Nowik, and music was supplied by Mr H. Knight, of Oakham.

THE HELPERS

Kettle, F. Hall and R. Bean; ski-ball, Messrs. E. Preston and C. Bradshaw; duck board, Mr. A. Gibson; motor race, Mr. W. Hudson; roll a penny, Mr. G. Pick; dice game, Mr. L. Gibson; table skittles, Messrs. J. Allum and A. Preston; tea, Mesdames W. Hudson, S. Baxter, F. Kettle, G. Pick and McDonald.

Fete treasurer was Mr. C. Clow and M.C. Mrs. S. E. Baxter.

WINNERS

Fete winners were: Skittles, 1 Mr. Jack Greasley, 2 Mr. Alex Clarke, 3 Mr. S. Forbes; dice, Mr. W. Curtis; duck board, Mr. H. Butcher and Mrs. W. Curtis; ski-ball, 1 Mrs. W. Curtis, 2 Mr. S. Forbes; table skittles, Mr. H. Butcher (men) and Mrs. W. Curtis (women).

Mercury photo 4435

Bulwick

Mr. C. C. Barlow was M.C.

5th June 1959

When the Manor House belonged to Mr and Mrs Warburton in the **1960s** they allowed their grounds to be used to raise funds for the Bowls Club as can be seen from the poster.



Manor House, Main Road, [next to Black Bull, opposite Church]

MAKING OVER THE RIVER CLUB

GARDEN FETE

at the
" MANOR HOUSE "
(by kind permission of Mr. and Mrs. Warburton)
SATURDAY, 30th JULY, 1960

To be opened at 3 p.m. by
ROY EDWARDS
(Guest Singer on A.T.V.'s "LUNCH BOX.")

NUMEROUS SIDESHOWS, COMPETITIONS
TEAS AT MODERATE CHARGES. **825**

First Club House

The first club house was a green timber building, repurposed from the ironstone quarry works, with a felt roof. It was positioned with the back to Bowling Green Lane. Entering the car park from the road it would have been on the left. Nowadays there is a tall hedge along the boundary and it is part of the current car park area.

There was a verandah and steps into the club house and, as it faced the green, only two or three strides were needed to step on to the green itself.

When this structure became redundant it was given to the village Cricket Club.

The New Pavillion

In **1960** a new timber building was erected in a different position to previously. Enter the car park and look right.

Known as the 'New Pavillion' a grant had been received from the Leicester Playing Fields Association.

'Bill' Atkinson's daughter Ivy attended the opening ceremony and made a speech marking the occasion. She was a regular visitor to the Club although she lived with husband Eric, a pharmacist, in Hove.

Below is the opening ceremony, standing next to Ivy Hill are Ted Bradshaw and Sid Baxter. In the background are Audrey Baxter, Annie Hall, Ted Woodward and to the extreme left 'Bob' Gibson, Secretary [E.E. Gibson] .



Bob Gibson designed the club flag which still hangs in the building today and was made by Margaret Thom in memory of her husband. This was used up until 2019 when it became rather fragile after so many years' exposure to the weather.

Bob was also responsible for the club badge design.

He was the first Club Secretary serving 1958-1982 and remained Treasurer until 1989.

The photo below gives a good idea of the new layout.

Sid Baxter is bowling.

Note the flag on the flag pole?



Canon MacDonald, the first President in 1960, retired in 1961 and moved away from the area having been Rector of St Peter and St Paul Church, Market Overton for 15 years.

In **1973** the Bowls Club was granted its first Licence to sell alcohol. The bar has always been a useful source of income. At one time a whole range of local beers were available from the pump.



The club house was used for many social/musical evenings. There was a pool /snooker table, and fruit machine, to entertain the members and a cigarette vending machine,

Regular domino, darts and whist leagues took place.

Club tours were very popular, and the club has a number of photos of these outings. Syd Forbes often drove the coaches.

The Club was a member of the LBA – Leicester Bowling Association which in 2013 unified with the Leicestershire Ladies County Bowling Association to form Bowls Leicestershire. They are affiliated to Bowls England.

An extension to the Bowls Club was agreed by the Committee in **1977** at a cost of £3,657. Many of the members were involved in the construction utilising their individual skills/ trades



Above: Left to right Alfie Barker known as Binky, David Gibson, Ted Bradshaw



1979

Above: Left to right Syd Forbes, Ted Bradshaw, 'Franny' Kettle on his 90th birthday, Wally Hudson and Bob Gibson. In front left David Gibson and right Tom Bateman. The bowls were set out in the figure of 90

[photo below shows the **new extension in the background**]-
the mens changing room had been added in 1984



1995 - Note the collar and ties

Originally the club and rules was designed for 'men only' players as was the custom in the sport. How Violet Hasselby was accepted playing with the men in 1948 we will never know, perhaps her father owning the green helped? A ladies section was introduced eventually and they had their own Lady Presidents of the Ladies section. However the rules stated "that the club will abide by all decisions made by the Mens Management Committee in administration, financial and running of the club! " Initially the ladies had a strict dress code including hats, gloves etc. This gradually changed to allow trousers and less formality.

John Mitchell President of the Club at the time of the 60th year celebration, caused a stir when he advised the governing body it was to be a 'mixed' game and he invited the Lady President from Leicester Bowls Association to attend.

60 years Celebration - 2005



As society changed it became necessary to modify cloakrooms etc including the needs of lady members, not just as visitors and caterers. The cigarette machine, fruit machine etc are long gone. The 'no smoking' ban became law in 2007.

Double glazing was installed in **2010**.

In **2011** the asbestos garage was dismantled and replaced with a concrete sectional store place.

The Club very gradually became a fully mixed organisation over the last twelve years and Ann Cusdin was the first lady to be President of this now united club in **2014**.

Disabled toilet facilities were added in **2015**.

Cladding was used to enhance and protect the fabric of the timber building with double glazed doors of modern design and size. The cladding has since been increased to cover more areas of the club house.

In this same year the Club adopted as their team bowling strip, white shirts with the club logo. Other clubs were now sporting colourful shirts and more relaxed sports wear.

75 years Celebration - 2021



**The celebration with Bowls England was delayed a year due to the covid epidemic
President Richard Lambert**

The Club withdrew affiliation to Bowls Leicestershire, which meant also withdrawing from Bowls England in **2022**.

Also in 2022 the Market Overton Parish Council designated Market Overton Bowls Club as a 'green space' in the Neighbourhood Plan.



PRESIDENTS DAY 2022 – supporting Papworth Heart Hospital – President Jonny Abbott

2023



**Captains v Presidents opening game of the season - President Jean Hutton
Supporting Rutland First Responders**

- **2023** Improvements were made to the rather out of date plumbing in line with current regulations.
- The beer pumps and associated cellar equipment have been removed but a good range of beers etc is still available in bottles and cans. The 'drink and driving' laws introduced in 1967 have affected social drinking.
- Although an 'outdoor club' the Club provides many opportunities in the winter months for members to meet up socially, with carpet bowls, quiz/race/darts/bingo/games nights.
- As the green was put to bed at the end of the 2023 season it was agreed by the Committee to remove the conifer hedge on the Pinfold Lane side. The club now hosts six rinks and it is felt that this will improve the growth on the end rink which currently spends a lot of time in shade.
- The mens' changing room has come to the end of its useful life; fund raising will begin in earnest to try and replace this with a more serviceable portable building fulfilling the needs of the bowlers and visitors and allow for storage of the multitude of equipment that a modern Bowls Club needs.

THE FUTURE

Market Overton Bowls Club is always looking to the future

Many volunteers currently and in the past have contributed to the success of the Market Overton Bowls Club. Time, physical effort, and finance and lots of enthusiasm, have been the reason for the success.

The premises have regularly been updated to reflect the changing needs of members but also to include an active social source, and are constantly under review.

Successful applications for grants have enabled a number of improvements during the past five years particularly.

Members of the community use the venue for family occasions both happy and sad. Fund raising and support for community projects as well as for the Club has always been a priority and this continues to this day.

It is impossible to include all the names of bowlers and friends from the past or the present to whom we owe gratitude. We need them to know that we appreciate we would not have this super facility without their contribution.

TRUSTEES

Up to four Trustees have been in place at the Market Overton Bowls Club since the death of Alfred Atkinson's wife.

The original Trustees in 1968 were S. Baxter, J.H. Osborn, and A. Clarke all from Market Overton and L.J. Ward from Colsterworth.

There have been changes since that time as Trustees have died, retired, moved away, etc. the most recent being the retirement in 2022 of Mr Sydney Forbes who was made a Trustee in 2001. Syd gave years of service to the Club as a bowler and behind the bar. He served as President for five different years.

The current Trustees are Mr John Mitchell [Market Overton – since 2001]
Mr Jonny Abbott [Castle Bytham – since 2013] and recent additions [2023]
Mr Richard Lambert [Oakham] and Mr 'Jack' Warner [Market Overton].

The Club is managed by a Committee.

Our sincere gratitude should go to
Alfred Atkinson
who ensured that the Market Overton Bowls Club has a permanent 'home'



'Franny' Kettle was a paper boy in the village in his 90's, and along with many other past members of the club he is buried in the village churchyard. ©David Village churchyard

Other historical photos are held in the Club collection





Compiled and researched by Annette Oliver, Secretary,
Market Overton Bowls Club, 2023

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that have contributed in any way,

Disclaimer

++Every effort has been made to ensure the information contained is correct however no responsibility can be taken by the compiler
or the Market Overton Bowls Club should there be any errors or omissions.
The information has come from a variety of sources. official records have been consulted when possible,
personal recollections can vary.