

Tooronga Bowls Club History

Tooronga Bowls Club, located in the picturesque Gardiners Creek Valley off Burke Road, was originally called "City Brick Bowls Club", as it was a private Club, for members of the City Brick Company, whose land the Club was created on, started in 1955/56.

In 1958/59, the Club went Public, and became Tooronga Bowling Club.

Many of the Foundation Members continued to play actively in the Club, through to 1993/94, when it merged with the neighboring Gardiner Bowls Club, to become Glen Iris Bowls Club. (Refer separate history pages for these Clubs).

Some of these Foundation Members included Charles Poulton, Norm and Grace Cooper, Jack and Astral Bridgart, Les and Lorna Allen, to name a few (All except Grace are deceased).

Tooronga's playing surface, the Green (a square 8 rinks), would be based upon part of the Brick Companies ground, and hence had a large amount of Brick debris as a foundation... this would, in later years, be part of the reason for the Greens closure, as part of Glen Iris Bowls Club in 1999/2000.

During the time of the Club, from Foundation until the early 1960's, the Tooronga's Clubhouse would be a wooden structure, to the east of the green. In the early 1960's, the more palatial City Brick made Clubhouse to the South East of the green, would be created and built on the site.

This Clubhouse would house the Tooronga Bowls Club activities for all of its years, with a small outer office, Kitchen with two entrances, main hall, and toilet/shower facilities. It was, in every sense of the word, a modern structure, with modern fittings.

The Club would, in its heyday, win a number of Pennant Flags in the RVBA and VLBA, most recently in 1989/90, winning the Section of Division 9 RVBA.

In the early 1980's, when the writer started playing at Tooronga, there were 16 Divisions of Players in the RVBA, compared with only 8 Divisions now in 2007/8, the space of 20 years. This period has seen the closure of many smaller Clubs, or merger with other Clubs, to maintain viability (as did Tooronga, Gardiner and Glen Iris later on).

Tooronga also maintained an active role in the hosting of the annual Victorian Blind Bowlers Championships and Carnival, held annually at the Tooronga Green and clubrooms.

During the 1980's, many of the Foundation Members passed away, and the small band of helpers on the Green, ably led by Charles Poulton (or Charlie, to his friends), changed in style, with Charlie leading a more younger group of helpers on the green work and maintenance.

Many consider the health and speed of a green as being paramount in the health and ability of a Club to attract and keep members. The Tooronga green, although small in size, was often running well (above 14 seconds), particularly when Charlie was playing on it. It enabled many members in later years to enjoy the game of lawn bowls, and adapt well to the newer synthetic surfaces well. How we hated going to other, slower, 11 or 12 second greens!

The Green was dedicated to the Late Charles Poulton in 1986/87, and the sign erected, with "The Charles Poulton Green" remains in place today, on the northern shelters of the green.

Tooronga produced many a handy player of bowls, with Jack Bridgart (known as "Mr Tooronga") winning the Club Singles Championship some 19 times. Barrie Close, later to become an Over 60's State Side skip, started playing at Tooronga, from 1981 – 1986.

The Club Board of Achievements (pictured later), highlights how strong the Club was, particularly in the 1950's and 60's. In later years, it remained a powerhouse of Division 3 (RVBA) and B2 (VLBA), with some State Championship wins to the members Credit.

In 1993/94, the Division 3 (RVBA) side gained promotion to Division 2, a position that has been maintained by the successive Clubs of Tooronga members.

The VLBA B2 side, has won its Pennant in later Clubs, and members are now part of an A1 and A2 side of a successive Club.

In 1993/94, the decision was taken to formally merge the two neighboring Clubs of Tooronga and Gardiner Bowls Club's, to form a new "Glen Iris Bowls Club". This happened relatively quickly and easily, with thanks to co-operating RVBA and VLBA staff. The fence that had separated the two clubs for so many years, was torn down, and old rivals became friends, in 1994/95.

Much fun had been had on the small green and in the clubhouse of Tooronga, with many happy times and good bowls being played. The monthly Smorgasbords, a highlight of the social bowls calendar, were eagerly attended, as were social bowls events each Sunday. If your name wasn't on the list by the Monday before, often you didn't get on the green, the popularity of playing at Tooronga was such. It is sad to think that this popularity and availability of Social Bowls, would diminish somewhat in later years at other clubs.

During the 1980's, Toorongas membership grew, through the recruitment of the Glen Waverley stationmaster (Graham Goldsack), who ably introduced many of his staff and drivers and guards of the Met and V/Line, to the sport... during the early 1990's, it was even proposed to make Tooronga a Victorian Railways Institute Club, as there were so many Railway or ex-Railway employees now involved in the Club. Tony Villani, Joseph Horsfield, Bob Dickson and others would join, and help make the Club such a youthful place to be, we were the envy of all surrounding Clubs.