

British bowlers in Peterborough

Elwood H. Jones, *Peterborough Examiner*

British lawn bowlers representing Scotland, England and Ireland toured part of Canada in the summer of 1906, and Peterborough was host for one of the early stops.

The story is well-told in *With the British Bowlers in Canada* written by Bailie D. Willox, of Glasgow, who was also one of the lawn bowlers. The British team had 43 players, of whom 26 were from Scottish clubs, 10 from English clubs and seven from Ireland. Bowlers from Wales had been invited, but none came. Also, ten women accompanied the British bowlers. The British players played 23 matches between July 28 and August 27, and only lost two matches. The sport had begun in Scotland, and had only recently been played in Canada.

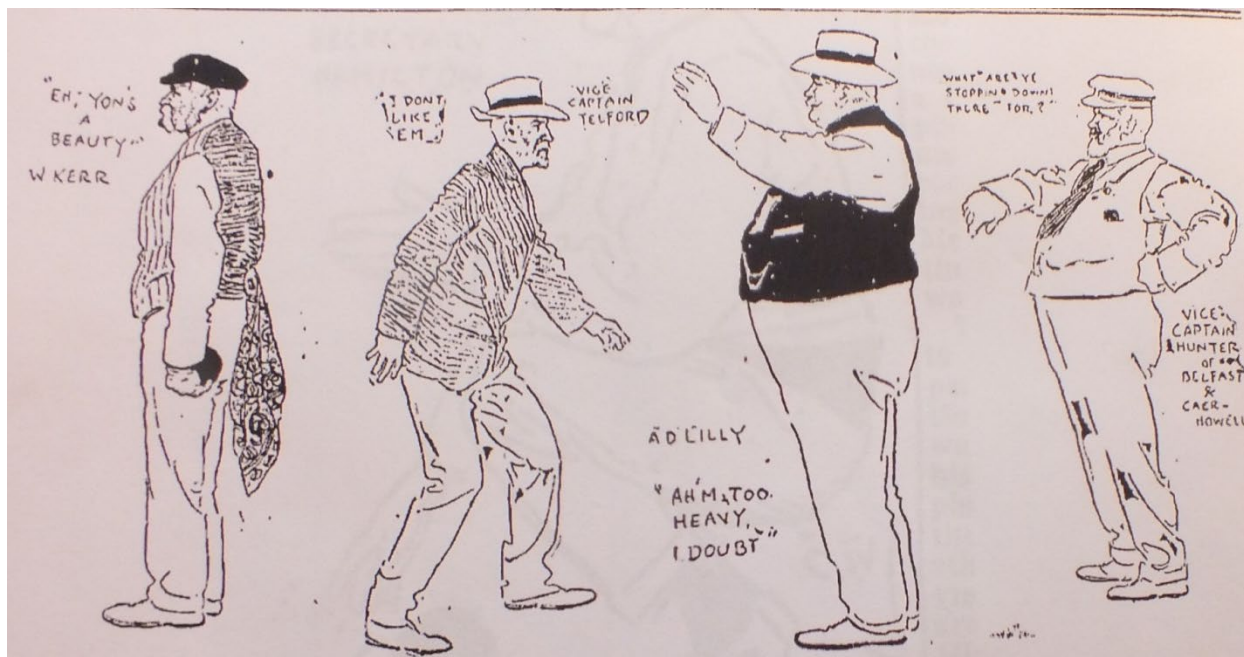
However, the book is quite engaging at several levels. Willox was a published poet whose book *Poems and Sketches (Mostly Masonic)* was published in 1903. He was an inveterate diarist, and he had earlier published *Diary of a Trip to Canada and the United States* (1903). He had also written the history of his own club, the Belvidere Bowling Club, in 1906.

The arrangements for the tour were largely in the hands of A. H. Hamilton, secretary of the Scottish Bowling Association, based in Edinburgh. The Ontario and West Ontario Bowling Associations issued the invitation in the fall of 1905. The original plan was that there would eight rinks from Britain:

three each from Scotland and England, and one from Ireland and Wales.

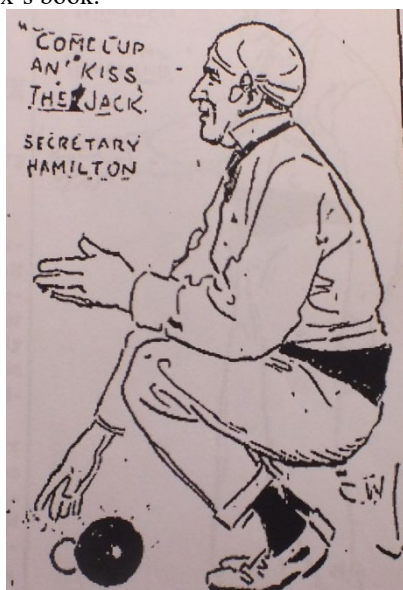
The early plans were to travel with the CPR, first sailing on the *Empress of Ireland*, and the British team would play in 14 places between Montreal and Windsor. However, they left earlier and so arranged with the Allan Line to travel on the turbine liner, *Virginian*. The itinerary of the Canadian tour was arranged by Colin R. W. Postlethwaite of the Canada Club, Toronto, who was the honorary Secretary-Treasurer of the Ontario Bowling Association. There were local committees in every city or major town on the tour, and all seemed to treat the bowlers lavishly.

Peterborough was host for one of the early stops, and the British team travelled overnight to arrive in Peterborough on Wednesday, August 1, and leave the following morning at 8 a.m. The Peterborough Bowling Club arranged for a reception at the CPR station, and then the visitors were escorted to the Oriental Hotel. The tour of the city included riding the streetcars and going over the Lift Lock on the *Water Lily* and touring Peterborough's major industrial works: CGE, American Cereal (Quaker Oats) and the William Hamilton works. Lunch and an evening banquet were at the Oriental, and the bowlers stayed at the Oriental during their stay. W. G. Lendrum, whose photographic studios were at 170 Charlotte Street, took photos of the group



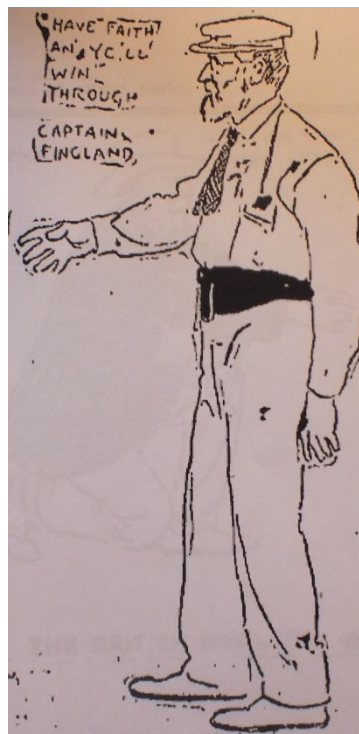
with the boat; however I have not seen these photos.

David Willox was keeping a diary before he was asked to prepare a published account. The book consists mainly of his diary entries, generally extensive. However, he added published accounts of many towns, some from tourist publications. In Peterborough, only his observations were used, and so I amplified his account by looking at the coverage given by the *Peterborough Examiner*. Callie Stacey drew my attention to the sketches by her grandfather, C. W. Jefferys. These were chiefly caricatures of British bowlers and several of these appeared in Willox's book.

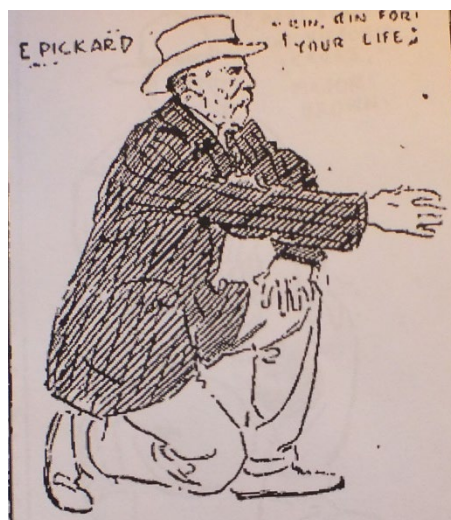


While the author congratulated the Canadian bowlers several times they were outplayed everywhere. Willox often complained of the quality of the greens, called lawns most everywhere in Canada. In Ridgetown, for example, "The green or lawn ... was both rough and uneven, with far too little space allowed per rink, our bowls often encroaching on the next rink." This sometimes caused interference in the play.

At Peterborough, eight local teams participated, five from Peterborough, and one each from Port Hope, Oshawa and Stouffville. The Peterborough Bowling Club played at the Brookside Bowling Green. This was located on Brock Street, between Aylmer and Bethune on property that had formerly been the garden for the home of Sheriff James Hall. This is now known as Fleming Park, a nod to Sir Sandford Fleming who had married a daughter of Sheriff Hall, and who was, with E. H. D. Hall, an executor for the Hall estate. The Hall property covered the entire block between Brock and Hunter and Aylmer and Bethune, and the buildings along Bethune Street were known as Fleming Place.



Willox observed (p. 94), "Peterboro' bowling green is not what we could have desired, but the players are all there. They have no ditches, but simply a lime-marked line or lines to indicate where the ditch should be. These lines serve the purpose very well, but are somewhat confusing to a stranger, as the jack when driven over the line has, according to their rules, to be brought back to the point at which it crossed."



At the end of the match, Willox observed, "We found the jack somehow, and played for we were

worth, finishing 82 shots up – not bad after an all-night’s travel in the train and a day crowded with sightseeing, etc., etc. The scene at the finish was one never to be forgotten, and to an outsider it must have been hard to tell which side had won.” (94)



The matches played very like modern lawn bowling and curling games. The team counted the balls closest to the jack until an opponent’s ball was deemed closer. They played 21 ends, and the highest score for any end was five. Then the total score for each team were added together to decide the margin of victory. The visitors won all the matches in Peterborough, scoring a total of 205 points against 123 for the hosts; giving a margin of victory of 82 points. However, at the banquet, everyone felt that they were winners.

I do not have the names of those on the out-of-town teams but the members of the five Peterborough rinks were:

1. R. M. Waddell, skip; W. M. Lang; S. T. Medd; G. K. Martin
2. Dr. T. N. Greer skip; A. L. Talbot; C. J. Seymour; R. Cottrell; R. Sturgeon
3. D. K. Moore, skip; W. F. Johnston; T. Frank Matthews; J. E. A. Fitzgerald
4. Dr. R. P. Boucher, skip; R. Davidson; R. Rannels; D. Belleghem; Dr. N. McClelland. H. Giroux, skip; J. W. Ferguson; W. Allison?; E. W. Cox; F. D. Kerr

Moore was the president of the Peterborough

Bowling Club in 1906. Several of the players for Peterborough were well-known professionals and business owners. There is no list of members for the Peterborough Bowling Club, but those playing against the British visitors were well-to-do.

At the banquet following the matches, Dr. Boucher proposed the toast to the visitors. He commented, “It was the unique experience to have friends from across the sea to play a sociable game of bowling. It was a greater experience to know the mind of Canadians were broadened by the visit, and he thought the visitors also would carry away with them a better knowledge of Great Britain’s greatest colony to their several homes. The visit he said would have a tendency to bind the colony and the Motherland more closely together ...”

“Bowling, he said, was a comparatively infantile game in Canada.” Only recently it was “taking a deep root in every town and city of importance in the Dominion, and is now advancing in popularity in rapid strides.”

As the *Examiner* observed, “Their visit to the Electric City has been looked forward to for many days by Peterborough’s citizens and it will be many days to come before their brief sojourn here will fade from the memories of those who were fortunate enough to meet their British friends.”

So much of our history is fragile. Fortunately, the British bowlers who visited Peterborough had their trip captured by a good writer, and C. W. Jefferys did some remarkable caricatures.

Thanks to Calley Stacey for drawing my attention to this story and to the C. W. Jefferys prints.

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Author! Author!
 A Night With TVA’s Writers

Including authors Peter Adams, Elwood Jones, Peter and Rosemary McConkey, Alan Brunger, Colum Diamond and Murray Paterson

Christmas goodies will be available Special musical guest Rob Phillips

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