

# 2021 at Bray Bowling Club

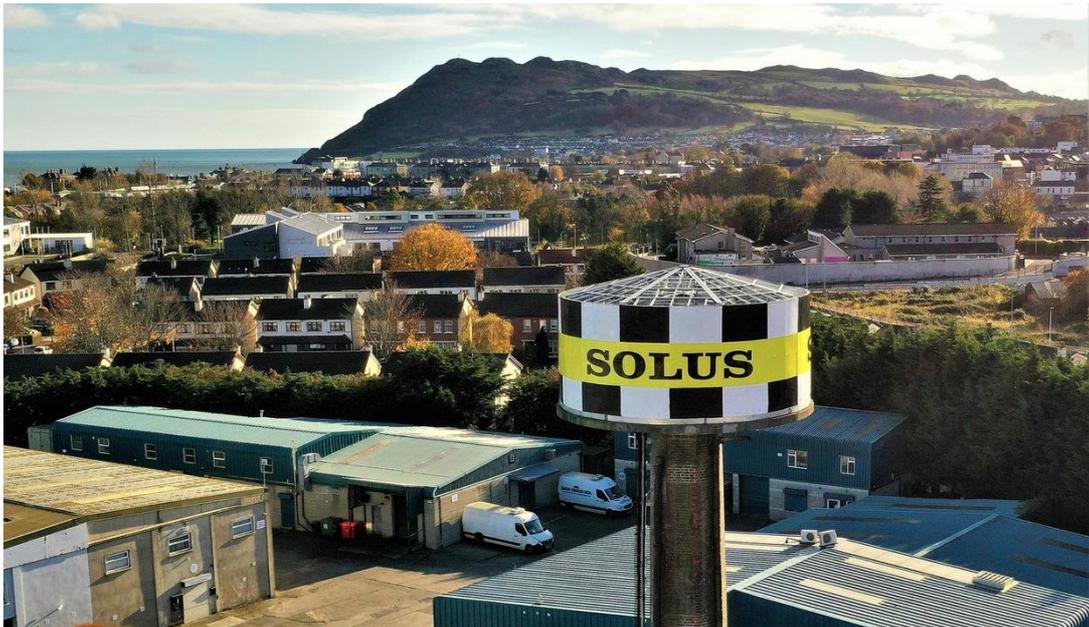
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## Winter

The year opened with Covid-19 rampant after Christmas festivities, hospitals filling up and the country in lockdown. Bowling greens, like schools and most shops, were shut and bowlers, like everyone else, had to pass the time as best they could. More than a few bawdy videos appeared on the Bray Bowling Fun WhatsApp group. And the good people of Bray had the pavements worn smooth with all their walking!

Medical staff and those in nursing homes were being vaccinated. Given their high average age, most bowlers could look forward to getting their jabs before the Summer. It took a month before the pressure on hospital staff showed any sign of levelling off. Vigorous mutations of Covid-19 popped-up around the world and the more contagious B-117 ("Kent") variant became the dominant one in Ireland. The government extended the lockdown into March then April. Bowlers resigned themselves to losing another season to the virus.

A fine Bray bowler in his day, Andy Seville, passed away. Later in the year one of the original lady members at Bray, Eileen Spurling, would also leave us.



*Illustration 1: The Solus tower, a Bray landmark, got a makeover this year. Picture courtesy of The Bray People.*

## Spring

Vaccination continued apace. Covid quarantine hotels were identified for people travelling here from certain countries. With the decrease in numbers being infected, lockdown restrictions were slowly eased. Classes returned to school. By the middle of April we were allowed to travel anywhere within our own counties or to a 20 kilometre radius outside. Outdoor sports, including lawn bowls, would be allowed from the 26<sup>th</sup> April.

The old boiler in the club-house was on its last legs and John Dunne used his trade

contacts to organise the installation of a new one.

*At the 2021 Cheltenham Festival, run behind closed doors, Tipperary's Rachael Blackmore secured the Top Jockey title after recording her sixth winner of the week. She won the second biggest event of the meeting, the Champion Hurdle, and came second in the Gold Cup, the premier prize in horse racing over fences. She continued her triumphant year when she became the first woman jockey to win the Aintree Grand National (on Minella Times). The first five horses home in the race were Irish, with numbers one and two having been trained by Henry De Bromhead at his yard in Knockeen, County Waterford.*

Finally members got the news they had been waiting for. The green would reopen in the last week of April. All rinks, seven days a week, 10am – 7pm save for maintenance on Monday and Friday mornings. Games were restricted to singles or pairs where each pair had to come from the same home. Rinks had to be booked in advance with sheets available in the equipment hut adjacent to the green.

Of course, when the bowling did restart, it was accompanied by wintry north-easterlies but at least they were dry...the rains would not arrive until a week later.

By May sports like bowling were allowed to have 15 people together outdoors. This meant that three pairs matches could run simultaneously along with one singles game. The BLI would stage all their Summer competitions in one form or another but the Bray executive decided not to participate as it did not wish non-members to visit Failte Park for the foreseeable future. Like the previous year, internal competitions for members would be organised. The executive did not have a problem with bowlers playing in the BLI championships but, to the dismay of some, any home draw would have to be played at the opponents' ground.

*In a repeat of the 2012 Olympics quarter-final, Katie Taylor successfully defended her world lightweight WBC, WBO, WBA and IBF titles against Natasha Jonas in Manchester. The Bray boxer's superior speed and accurate combination punching prevailed again in an absorbing 10-round affair.*

*As if they didn't have enough problems, the health service suffered a ransomware attack by a Russian gang of cyber-criminals. They had to bring down much of their system leading to delays in treatment for many patients.*

The club received some private sponsorship which enabled the purchase of a new hedge cutter and strimmer. It also financed the erection of a new sign to attract members of the public. This work was carried out by painter, Marcus Donohoe, ably assisted by Owen Byrne, Tiernan Kavanagh and Chris Fitzgerald. A second sign was put up in the Summer.



Schedules for the men's BLI and IBA competitions were published. 15 clubs were participating but - due to concerns over the pandemic – six were not: Aer Lingus, Bray, Greystones, Kenilworth, Leinster and North Kildare.

## **Summer**

To make up for the club's dropping out of normal competition an internal league was organised by a five-person committee: Bernie Tracey, Terri McKeon, John Browne, Niall Shelley and Pat Crinnion. Each of the eight teams involved would play their opponents over seven consecutive Saturdays. Each match would involve two rinks of three doing battle. Every team had a seven-player squad so each player would have to miss one match. The team captains were Alan Rath, Marcus Donohoe, Walter Doyle, John Cheevers, Tommy Cahill, Tommy Murphy, Eamonn Kennedy and Eoghain Brady.

Two more pieces of good news were (i) the announcement that normal club competitions would go ahead this year and (ii) the decision to allow Bray teams or players drawn at home in BLI championships to actually play their matches in Bray (but without spectators).

The bad news was the resignation of Stephen Morris as manager of the club bar. Over the years Steve had put in a vast amount of work to keep the facility running and the punters lubricated. The members were very aware of this and deeply sorry to see him go.

The bar had not been used since the start of the pandemic so Frank Devlin, Owen Byrne and Eddie Kelly spent a few hours one morning removing the out-of-date drinks then recycling the bottles. One unnamed member took some "vintage" bottles of Bulmers Cider off their hands while simultaneously threatening to sue the club if he got sick!

The bar licence cost the club about €2,000 pa yet even before the pandemic the facility had been under-used. Into the breach stepped the hard-working Owen Byrne who agreed to manage it. Novice staff were recruited: Bernie Tracey, Dave McMahon and Ger

Minogue. Marshalled by Owen, they went under the name of *The Lounge Team*.

The internal league kicked off with two matches every Saturday morning followed by another two in the afternoon. It was good to see so many enjoying their bowling in the festive atmosphere of the first day.



*Illustration 2: Marcus Donohoe and Dave McMahon enjoying a rollup.*

With the large vaccination programme underway the country continued its reopening. At Failte Park, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday rollups for all were back by mid-June. A good crowd turned out for the first one with all 6 rinks in use.

In the Marper Cup (senior singles) Patrick Brosnan gave a spirited performance on the grass of Blackrock but could not prevent Mick Strain from progressing on a 21-16 scoreline. In Failte Park Zach Martin was overcome by another Blackrock veteran, Mick Keegan. Ray Rigley failed to make it past Derek Borwick in Kenilworth. In the Boyd (senior pairs) John Cheevers and Peter Gough had the daunting task of playing internationals, Shane Leonard and Nicky Smyth, on their Crumlin sward and left empty-handed.

The club's membership drive resulted in a trickle of new faces to the green. John Dunne and Ger Minogue spent many evenings turning three young men from the locale into real bowlers.

When Chris Fenton moved from Capetown to Wexford he found that he missed the competitive bowling he had enjoyed in his home country. Despite the long train trips it would involve, he joined Bray BC and threw himself into the club's bowling activities. With so much experience, he proved himself to be a very able skip on the rink.

Marcus Donohoe, a painter by trade, was hired for the mammoth task of repainting the blue railings around the ground. A hard worker, he still had the energy to roll-up after a long session with the brush. In advance of his work, Eoghain Brady cut 24 bags worth of griselinia hedging over three days to make room for the brushwork.

In the internal league, Wally Doyle's team, bolstered by the presence of Phyllis Brett and other good bowlers, made the early running. The Lounge Team served drinks outdoors to all who had a thirst to quench after their game. And sometimes the sun came out!

Outside the Marper Cup all BLI championship teams were led by John Cheevers. He and Peter Gough added Niall Shelley to their team for the BLI Senior Trips (Baird Cup) match against David Doyle's Ierne at Failte Park. They took a good lead then survived a late comeback by the visitors to run out 22-16 winners. Patrick Brosnan was added for the Senior Fours (Sixsmith) at home against a Railway Union four that had reached the previous year's final. In front of an enthusiastic home support, a close battle played out. Railway made the early running then Bray took the lead mid-way through and held it (just) as the game ended in the gathering dusk.



*Illustration 3: Senior Trips: Niall Shelley (Bray), Ken Whelan (Ierne) and Peter Gough (Bray).*

The keypad-operated door to the men's dressing room had been, for a long time, prone to getting stuck. The indefatigable John Dunne and Owen Byrne simplified the situation by attaching a sliding bolt secured with a padlock. The key would be stored with the others in the ladies' changing room.

Marcus Donohoe underwent his final coaching test at Failte Park from Margaret McNevin of Crumlin. With Eamonn Kennedy and Owen Byrne acting as students, he showed them how to deal with a displaced jack, a hidden jack, a jack in the ditch and touchers. At the end Margaret had no hesitation in appointing Marcus a senior bowling coach.

The country was paid a welcome visit by the Azores High which brought with it a few weeks of Mediterranean skies. As bowlers sweated on the green, bar sales rose.

While other teams rose and fell below them in the internal league, Wally's outfit maintained their leadership throughout and they became champions with a round of matches to go. When it was all over they had 10½ points to spare over second placed Eoghain Brady's team. The winning squad was: Wally Doyle, Phyllis Brett, Colm Heaslip, Eddie Morley, Bryon Dancer, Pat Crinnion and Frankie Byrne.

The quintet that ran the internal league, in a moment of revolutionary zeal, had dubbed themselves the *Central Competition Control Committee*. They agreed to oversee the club championships also and made the draws. The green became busy with the resultant

matches.

Congratulations were due to Noleen Kelly of Crumlin and Mark Brown of Dun Laoghaire on becoming 2021 Champion of Champions in Dun Laoghaire. This was the first time the men's competition was won by a Dun Laoghaire bowler since its inception in 1968. It was Noleen's 4<sup>th</sup> win having won before in '08, '13, and '17.

In the BLI Senior Trips, John Cheevers, Peter Gough and Niall Shelley played the same Railway Union father and son (Derek and Adam Kells) that they had beaten in the fours competition. Though Railway showed their usual skills in taking bowls out, it was, Bray, at home again, who drew their way to victory. Final score: 18-13.

The Bray trio were joined by Eamonn Kennedy for their O'Leary Cup (over-55s) match at home to Skerries. On another sultry day, their momentum carried them to victory over combative opponents, 22-18.

More sparks flew in round 2 of the senior rinks (Sixsmith) when a Crumlin quartet visited Failte Park. On another sunny evening in front of a big crowd, Bray gave Stephen Millane's men a roasting, restricting them to just two shots on the board before the great man chose to concede the match with seven ends to go. In fairness to the losers they were without first choice Richard Kelly and nor did they have any of the luck going on the night. Final score: 20-2.



*Illustration 4: Patrick Brosnan, Niall Shelley, John Cheevers and Peter Gough celebrate their win over Crumlin in the Senior Fours.*

There was one LBLI competition for the Bray ladies – "The LBLI Covid Championships". The winner of a knock-out phase amongst themselves would go through to finals against representatives from other clubs. Marge O'Leary won the singles and Betty and Breeda Keogh, the pairs.

In Round 3 of the O'Leary Cup John Cheevers and his men travelled to Lerne, their opponents including the same three lads they had beaten in the trips competition. Things

looked good as Bray went into an 11-4 lead on a tricky green. But after Bray dropped a six, lerne began to catch up. It finished 21-15 to the home side.

*The 2020 Olympic Games were held in Tokyo, delayed by a year due to Covid-19. Ireland's Paul O'Donovan and Fintan McCarthy from Skibbereen Rowing Club won Ireland's first Olympic rowing gold, in the double sculls. Also among the medals were the Irish women's coxless four – Aifric Keogh, Eimear Lambe, Fiona Murtagh and Emily Hegarty – who took bronze.*

As the country opened-up, the highly contagious *Delta variant* of Covid-19, had spread from India to the rest of the world. In Ireland the resulting count of daily infections and ICU patients began to rise again.

John Cheevers' other two teams met their ends in the quarter-finals, both of which were away on grass. In the trips Shane Leonard's men proved too strong at Crumlin. In the fours at lerne Bray were beaten by the same quartet that had turfed them out of the O'Leary Cup.

*In Tokyo's Olympic Games, Irish boxing was once more successful with Dubliner, Kellie Harrington, taking gold for the women's lightweight and Belfast man Aidan Walsh winning bronze in the men's welterweight. The latter missed his chance to do better when he injured his foot celebrating his quarter-final win.*

Bray's BLI delegate, Roddy O'Leary, announced his retirement from the role. He had represented the club for nearly 30 years at BLI council meetings, becoming one of its elder statesmen. John Cheevers, who had done the job for Greystones, now took on the role for Bray. Roddy also handed over his green duties (settings, etc) to Pat Crinnion and Brendan Duffy.

After the internal club league had ended, the same eight teams competed in a knock-out competition, the matches also taking place on consecutive Saturdays. In the final Marcus Donohoe's team was victorious over that of John Cheevers.

When using the club bar, members were now asked to show proof of vaccination and sign a register in case contact tracing were needed.



*Illustration 5: The club's Philadelphus (Bride's Blossom) in full bloom.*

## **Autumn**

In a novel Saturday rollup, points were awarded for any bowl to touch the jack, and also for the three bowls closest to it. Victory went to the Eoghain Brady-led team where newcomer Adrian Flaherty had a game to remember. Another newcomer John Gilliland also did well on the day. Pat Crinnion, who had come up with the concept, organised things on the day. The format continued for the following two Saturdays.

Our senior singles representative in the LBLI Covid Championships, Marge O'Leary, had a tall order playing Crumlin's Sarah Kelly away. The ground had been sanded in places where a fox had dug holes and the Bray woman was beaten as much by the heavy green as her opponent's skill.

In the senior pairs, things went more favourably for Bray's Betty and Breeda Keogh. In the semi-final held in Skerries, the ladies came up against a powerful Leinster team. In a tight match it was 16 apiece after the full 18 ends but our girls emerged victorious from the extra end. Terri McKeon and Bernie Tracey were present in support and also kept the members back in Bray updated with WhatsApp progress reports. Later that day in the final the Bray pair really found their mojo, beating CYM 20-2. LBLI senior champions!



*Illustration 6: Betty Keogh, Marguerite McGonagle - President LBLI, and Breda Keogh in Skerries.*

In the wider bowling world, Crumlin won the men's Division 1 title with CYM runners-up. The LBLI leagues had been cancelled due to the pandemic.

The club championship finals were run off in the last weekend of September. Here is how they were reported in The Bray People by hon. sec. Frank Devlin.

"The annual club finals were held over the weekend with the weather Gods looking down favourably on both Saturday and Sunday. The first final on Saturday was the Mixed Triples where the Chris Fenton-led team defeated Marcus Donohoe and his companions. This game finished level after 12 ends and a superb bowl from Chris then won the day in the extra end. The Men's 4 Bowl Pairs was won by John Dunne and Eamonn Kennedy who defeated Zach Martin and Gabriel Cahill in a close-fought affair. The Men's Handicap Singles was won by Peter Gough who defeated Walter Doyle with a superb display of bowling. The day finished with Terri McKeon defeating Marge O'Leary 21-20 in the Ladies 2 Bowl Singles. This one was decided by the very last bowl.



Mixed Trips  
 Pat Tracey, Betty Keogh, Chris Fenton (winners),  
 Will McKeon, Pam O'Leary, Marcus Donohoe (runners-up).

"The Ladies and Men's 2 Bowl Pairs Finals started Sunday's proceedings. In the Ladies victory went to Breeda Keogh and Therese Martin over Terri McKeon and Betty Keogh. The men's event was won by Michael Dunne and John Browne who defeated Chris Fenton and Roddy O'Leary. Peter Gough took to the rink again in the Men's 2 Bowl Singles where he defeated Patrick Brosnan to claim his second title of the weekend. This just left both the Ladies and Men's Championship Finals to be decided. In the ladies Betty Keogh defeated Terri McKeon to win her second final of the weekend. In the Men's match Eoghain Brady, fresh from his spanish holiday, claimed his first club championship with victory over his old workmate, Eamonn Kennedy. Both Betty and Eoghain will now go forward to represent Bray in next year's Champion of Champions events in Dun Laoghaire. All in all, a great weekend of bowling and there is the whiff of change in the air as the newer members start to make their mark."

The whole weekend was slickly managed by the hard-working competition committee - John Browne, Pat Crinion, Bernie Tracey, Terri McKeon and Niall Shelley. The latter attended all the finals and took pictures of the competitors involved. Other members marked the singles games and turned the scoreboards. Owen Byrne and his lounge team kept the bar going throughout.

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|---------------------------|--|--|
| Ladies' Championship:     | Winner: Betty Keogh                      | Runner-up: Terri McKeon                  |
| Ladies' Two-Bowl Singles: | Winner: Terri McKeon                     | Runner-up: Marge O'Leary                 |
| Ladies' Two-Bowl Pairs:   | Winners: Breeda Keogh,<br>Theresa Martin | Runners-up: Betty Keogh,<br>Terri McKeon |
| Men's Championship:       | Winner: Eoghain Brady                    | Runner-up: Eamonn Kennedy                |
| Men's Handicap Singles:   | Winner: Peter Gough                      | Runner-up: Walter Doyle                  |
| Men's Two-Bowl Singles:   | Winner: Peter Gough                      | Runner-up: Patrick Brosnan               |

Men's Four-Bowl Pairs:	Winners: Eamonn Kennedy, John Dunne	Runners-up: Zach Martin, Gabriel Cahill
Men's Two-Bowl Pairs:	Winners: John Browne, Michael Dunne	Runners-up: Chris Fenton, Roddy O'Leary
Mixed Triples:	Winners: Chris Fenton, Betty Keogh, Pat Tracey	Runners-up: Marcus Donohoe, Pam O'Leary, Will McKeon

*Leona Maguire helped Europe's lady golfers win the Solheim Cup against the USA, 15-13, in Toledo, Ohio. The 26-year-old professional from Ballyconnell, Co.Cavan, was a wildcard pick and won four-and-a-half points from five matches, a competition record for a rookie. The men's Ryder Cup team was captained by Irishman, Padraig Harrington, but were well beaten in Wisconsin by a strong USA outfit. In Gaelic games, the ladies of Wicklow regained their Intermediate status by beating Antrim 2-17 to 1-9 in the Junior All-Ireland Football final.*



Ladies' Two-Bowl Pairs  
 Breeda Keogh, Terri McKeon (runners-up),  
 Theresa Martin, Betty Keogh (winners).

As autumn tightened its grip, the morning rollups were put back to 11am to give any frost the chance to fade. The Wednesday league restarted with a good attendance on the first morning including Crumlin's Maurice McCabe, fresh from his Junior BLI Trips victory. The play involves a tricky change of opposition at the end of each game but resident expert,

Brendan Duffy, was unavailable to sort things out. Confusion reigned for a time before the final round but the skips got there in the end. The following week saw an influx of refugees from Greystones as their green had closed...and Brendan was back!

In the final of the postponed 2019/20 Winter League, CYM beat Leinster to win their first title (apart from when they won it in 2004 in a combined team with Rathgar). In the Winter Champion of Champions, Meath's Johnnie Dixon defeated Rita Saunders of Dun Laoghaire.

This year's AWBL competitions went ahead as normal with Bray entering two teams. Bray A was captained by John Cheevers with Terri McKeon and Bernie Tracey helping with team selection. Frank Devlin led Bray B, ably assisted by Phyllis Brett and Eamonn Kennedy. The teams played one another twice in preparation for the competition.

Club member, Dave Meaney, organised a refurbishment of the club's toolshed. The front half was removed altogether while the rear, which at one time had been given over to a large water tank, was refloored and reroofed. The new outside space made available was levelled to form a patio for the bar. The opportunity was taken to get rid of any stored items no longer useful.



*Illustration 7: Dave Meaney and friend prepare the toolshed for "shrinkage".*

A Friday night do was held in the bar to celebrate Halloween and also to say farewell to Ann Downhams who was off to South Africa for the winter (jealous, us? - never!). The lady herself and her daughter laid on a tasty spread and some interesting costumes were in evidence.

*The pandemic still raged and government made the decision to administer*

*booster vaccine shots to the over-60s which would, of course, benefit many bowlers. In view of the dangers the club's AGM was postponed until the new year.*

Groundsman Chris sprayed the ditches for moss and other undesirable. He was helped by a small group of hardy members who lifted and cleaned the mats. Dave Meaney finished his work on the toolshed with the addition of a door made from recycled floorboards which was then painted by Marcus Donohoe. Along with some new shelving, a light and sockets, Chris now had a good, clean space to store tools and equipment.

This year it was decided by the LBLI to award a special badge to all those players who had won each of the 4 Senior Championships at some point in their bowling career. It was to be known as the "Full Set" badge and the initial set was presented at the annual BLI dinner. The seven who received the award were: Marie Barber - Blackrock; Phyllis Brett - Bray; Ina Culligan - CYM; Marian Hoey - CYM; Noeleen Kelly - Crumlin; Phyllis Nolan - Blackrock; Alice Tunney - Kenilworth.



*Illustration 8: Phyllis Brett is honoured for winning LBLI senior singles, pairs, trips and rinks competitions.*

Patrick Brosnan decided that his club history was finally finished. While looking for a suitable way to publish it, he made two printouts available for circulation among members.

One of Bray's landmarks, the Solus Water Tower, had a makeover. The owners, Cellnex, invested over €300,000 in the improvement works that meant the famous Solus logo was re-painted in the yellow and black, with all telecommunications equipment on the tower kept out of sight.

## **Winter**

The Winter League reached its Christmas break. At the half-way stage Dun Laoghaire A led Section 1 by some margin. John Cheevers' Bray A occupied third place and in a good position to overtake second-placed Leinster Lions B in the new year. Frank Devlin's Bray B

led Section 2, with Leinster A three points behind. Section 3 was tight at the top and, north of the Liffey, Meath were running away with Section 4. Herbert Park had installed a new green but the Bray A side that visited had found it quite tricky to play on.

After Cabinteely FC acquired a majority stake in Bray Wanderers, the two clubs merged. The new outfit retained Wanderers' identity and continued to play at the Carlisle Grounds.

When Katie Taylor beat Kazakhstan's Firuza Sharipova in Liverpool, it was her third victory of the year. The 35-year old said afterwards, "overall it was my 20<sup>th</sup> [professional] fight; 20 wins, still undisputed, still undefeated, so I can't complain."

When the final Wednesday League game had ended, the top three spots went to John Cheevers, Phyllis Brett and Gabriel Cahill respectively. Phyllis and Eddie Kelly had been the organisers.

The Omicron variant of Covid-19 burst onto the global scene causing another wave of infections. With this in mind, and for the second year in a row, the club decided not to stage its usual Christmas/prize-giving party.



*Illustration 9: New men's champion, Eoghain Brady, enjoying the winter in Spain.*