

## Lawn Bowling and Literature

A general impression is that lawn bowling is for old people. Although the majority of players are over 55, there are younger bowlers. At the national level, there is a Canadian Junior Tournament for boys and girls 18 and under. References in literature to the game of lawn bowling can be found from at least the 1500s to modern day historical fiction and true stories -- and these references to people enjoying a game of bowls are to younger and middle aged people!

References to bowling are very common in Shakespeare's plays. Some of those references raise interesting research questions. Consider first this example from *Cymbeline* set in England during the time of Caesar's rule over the Holy Roman Empire. Cloten, son to Cymbeline's queen by a former husband, says in Act II, Scene I:

Was there ever man had such luck? When I kissed **the jack** upon an upcast, to be hit away! (lines 1,2)  
Come, I'll go see this Italian: what I have lost to-day **at bowls** I'll win to-night of him.  
(line 50, 51)

So the question is whether royalty played at bowls during the time in which the play was set, i.e., is there historical accuracy, or did Shakespeare use a reference to playing at bowls because of the connection of bowls to royalty during his life time?

Consider next the novel *The Thirteen* by Honoré de Balzac. Balzac, known for his descriptions of contemporary French society, wrote the three stories in *The Thirteen* about a rich and powerful secret society in 19th century France. He writes:

This esplanade, which commands a view of Paris, has been taken possession of by **bowl-players**; it is, in fact, a sort of **bowling green** ...”

Finally, bowls was also played in Nantes during the German occupation of France. *Agent Zigzag* by Ben Macintyre is the true story of double agent Eddie Chapman during World War II. Eddie, or Fritz as the Germans called him, was being trained at Villa de la Bretonniere as a spy for Germany. Macintyre writes:

The rest of the morning might be taken up with sabotage work, coding exercises, or parachute practice. Lunch was at 12.30, followed by a siesta until 3.00 or 3.30, followed by more training. In the evening they might play bridge, or **bowls on the lawn**, or ...

These references to bowlers are not to retirees! Nor are the references to the bowlers in the following excerpts. Why not try matching some references to lawn bowling in literature with the book and author.

### Text

(A) It is the processions that matters, the exchange of gifts, the **royal games of bowls**, the tilts, jousts and masques.

(B) Costard: He is a marvellous good neighbour, faith,  
and a **very good bowler**:

(C) Queen: What sport shall we devise here in this garden,  
To drive away the heavy thought of care?

First Lady: Madam, we'll **play at bowls**.

(D) He goes straight to Henry. He finds him in the sunshine, playing a **game of bowls** with some French lords. Henry can make a **game of bowls** as noisy as a tournament: whooping, groaning, shouting of odds, wails, oaths.

(E) The man ... proved an assiduous attendant at these **games of bowls**;

(F) A little altering of the one side **maketh the bowle to run biases waies**.

(G) Here very merry, and played us and our wives at **Bowls**.

(H) Petruchio: Well, forward, forward! Thus **the bowl should run**,  
And not unluckily **against the bias**.

### Book & Author

- 1) *Wolf Hall* by Hilary Mantel, 2009
- 2) *Wolf Hall* by Hilary Mantel, 2009
- 3) *The Thirteen* by Honoré de Balzac, 1833
- 4) Shakespeare's *Love's Labour Lost* Act 5, Scene 2
- 5) Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* Act 5, Scene 4
- 6) Shakespeare's *Richard II* Act 3, Scene 4
- 7) *Samuel Pepys Diary* May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1661
- 8) *Castle of Knowledge* by Robert Recorde, 1556

Lawn bowling is a game of strategy, and provides many health benefits, such as improved fitness and coordination, and skill development. Exercise, cognitive stimulation, and social interaction are important for healthy aging. Lawn bowling provides all three while enjoying exercise in the outdoors.

Games can be social or competitive – the choice is up to the players. Clubs have daily draws where teams are made from those who show up. Clubs also hold their own tournaments, and

there are tournaments at the local, regional, provincial, national, and international levels for competitive players.

The **lawn bowling season** in Greater Victoria runs from mid April to mid October. Why not visit an Open House at a lawn bowling club this April. Lawn bowling might just be the sport for you!

ANSWERS: A1 or 2, B4, C6, D1 or 2, E3, F8, G7, H5

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