

## THE HISTORY OF RYEDALE COMMUNITY AND LEISURE CENTRE 2024

The centre was built by Ryedale District Council on the site of an old quarry filled with refuse, in the mid 1980s. It was officially opened by Lady Feversham on 10 September 1987.

The late Henry Richardson, a successful haulier from Slingsby and a dedicated bowler, was determined to establish an indoor bowls centre in Malton and he eventually persuaded RDC to build one. Henry visited many indoor bowls clubs nationwide before settling on the current layout and a great deal of credit and appreciation has to be given to him for his determination, business experience and generosity in establishing the premises which bore his name – Richardson's Indoor Bowls and Leisure Centre.

When Henry retired in 1998 the Ryedale Indoor Bowls Club Committee was formed. Under the chairmanship of Tom Nairn many improvements were made. A suspended ceiling was added to the 8 rink playing area (previously open to the roof apex) and the original off-peak electric storage heaters replaced by the present oil-fired system. The bar area overlooking the bowls green was partially raised and re-decorated and the playing area was refurbished. The Bowls Club is very indebted to the management committee of that time.

Over the years the Bowls Club membership declined. The emphasis had been on competitive bowling, a district team and national competitions. Eventually it was unable to pay the rent and mortgaged the fixtures and fittings to RDC. In 2012 RDC decided to put the premises up for sale.

A new Committee was formed to try and resolve the situation which consisted of bowls club members and local people who were concerned about the loss of the facility which could have become a commercial storage site or used for building. Ryedale Community and Leisure Centre began with no money and a debt to RDC for the furniture. In order to buy the premises for the community the committee had to raise a huge amount of money from scratch. The only way this was possible was to create two units for rent so that a mortgage was affordable. Bowls Club members and others were approached for donations and loans so that the building could be divided. A local racehorse trainer lent £25,000 and club members lent £18,000. Since then all loans have been repaid with interest. Grants were difficult to obtain as we had no collateral nor a lease from RDC. The high street banks would not consider a loan or mortgage on the strength of the property alone. After approaching a special community consultant we were directed to Unity Bank which specialised in lending to community projects. Unity Bank agreed to lend £245,000 over twenty years but required a personal guarantee of £110,000. This still left a shortfall of £130,000 which RDC agreed to lend over ten years at a fixed interest rate (including the solar panels).

Although we had budgeted for the building works our architects (who drew up the plans free of charge) had not accounted for the necessity of a fire wall between the restaurant and the tenants units. We also faced extra costs through Northern Powergrid's insistence that we had a new mains cable under the carpark in order to create separate meters for the two tenants.

For the project to go ahead we had to convince RDC Councillors at a special meeting that we could arrange to purchase the building. The meeting at Ryedale House was well attended by Bowls Club members who will remember the difficulties of putting our case but the vote eventually went in our favour.

Our first builder was not registered for VAT which made his quotation very attractive as we were not eligible to register. A few days before he was due to start he decided he was unable to do the work and we had to employ another contractor who was known to one of our members. When he had nearly completed the alterations he went bankrupt and the process began again. Thankfully at this stage there was not much more work to do.

In order to have an income as soon as possible we had to have a very clear understanding with RDC to be able to do the alterations before we officially owned the building – something a private buyer would never do. Two prospective tenants had agreed to rent a unit – Dance Expression which was run by two sisters, daughters of a Bowls Club member, and Brooklyn Playgroup whose previous premises were taken back by the Education Authority to provide an extension to Norton Junior School. As soon as the unit divisions were in place the tenants started to fit out their units to their own specifications. It was imperative that RCLC had some income as soon as we could. RDC would not sign the sale documents until we had signed leases with both tenants which proved to be a very long drawn out affair. We paid a rent to RDC for the best part of a year. The whole process was fraught with financial danger as a lot of money was invested before RCLC owned the premises.

We began a long list of improvements with car park repairs in three separate stages as funds became available. After spending nearly £50,000 we now have 86 marked out places which is a great asset and very well used. Refurbishment of the restaurant consisting of a new dividing screen, carpet and tables was carried out and the bar has been recently redecorated. The first two catering managers were unsuccessful before Julie Copland took on the restaurant under a shared catering agreement – RCLC providing the building, furniture and fittings and Julie running the day to day business. RIBC elected to stay as part of the RCLC thus benefitting from RCLC's charity status and rate relief. Both the Bowls Club and Catering pay a contribution rather than a rent which is agreed between RCLC and each party.

The Bowls Club has recently undergone a total refurbishment including new green carpet plus surrounding seating etc and LED lighting. Some years ago the Club refurbished the toilets, much of the work being done by members. The next project is a mural on the long blank wall to be jointly funded by RIBC and RCLC.

When the Bowls Club re-started in 2014 there were about 120 members, but now there are about 250 mainly due to encouraging social bowling and the all round improvements to the building.

We still need to consider a heating system which would enable separate provision to the RIBC and the restaurant. A complete roof replacement will be necessary in the not too distant future with the profiled steel sheets already losing their paint. RCLC is putting money aside and intends to make plans for the replacement once the RDC loan is paid off in 2028. With the present cost around £300K this is a long term project. There will always be emergencies and requirements along the way so our savings need to be readily accessible. We are now a very successful Community Centre with finances well under control – a far cry from the early days when the stress at times was overwhelming. It is now gratifying for those of us who remember the early days to see the centre enjoyed by so many people and owned by the community of Ryedale.

John Harrison, RCLC Chairman 2013 to date.