



Palace Of Dreams

Opens In Melbourne

It started out as a whisper in 1869 when Brighton locals first rolled woods beside the Court House Hotel; became a murmur six years later when the curiously named Bohemian Bowling Club strutted their stuff at Thompson's Council Hotel; and shouted out loud when the newly formed Brighton Bowls and Tennis Club opened for business in Male Street on a rainy October day in 1881.

Prime mover during the club's embryo stage was Sir Thomas Bent, a business luminary of the bay-side precincts, a former State Premier and a man known for getting things done - one of the original

movers and shakers - and he used his considerable clout to acquire the two-acre site on which the club conducted its affairs for more than 125 years.

Moving forward, it was more than a decade ago that club stalwart Ken Armstrong, a man of equally fierce determination, had a futuristic vision for bowls in the area.

Like so many inner suburban establishments, Ken's beloved Brighton club was suffering a decline in member numbers and had limited parking available for bowlers and guests. But it was situated in a locality where real estate entrepreneurs grappled with the lack of available grounds for new housing developments.

The concept, involving an alignment with the neighbouring Dendy Park club, selling off the blue chip land holding in Male Street, and using the funds to create a modern state-of-the-art indoor-outdoor bowls complex on the original Dendy Park Bowls Club site, was an arduous affair.

However, come the summer of 2009, following years of working through mountains of bureaucratic red tape and literally hundreds of negotiations with local and state authorities, Ken's brainchild, the Brighton Bowling & Sporting Club, roared into existence at the end of Breen Drive, in historic Dendy Park.

The \$6 million complex includes an eight-rink indoor carpet green and another four-rink 'international' indoor carpet green that is purpose-built for televised competitions. These greens feature the renowned 'Greengauge' playing carpets, which were installed by Dales Sports Surfaces, who sent their top man out from England to supervise the installation.

Several of the world's leading bowlers have already given the greens an unequivocal thumbs-up, with recent visits from World and Commonwealth Games champions Steve Glasson, Kelvin Kerkow, Joyce Lindores and Mark Jacobsen - who between them have enough gold medals to float a third world country's national debt - resulting in glowing endorsements.



• **Above:** Armstrong with Dales Sports Surfaces (UK) managing director Richard Steadman during the floor installation.

• **Left:** Brighton stalwart Ken Armstrong gets the project underway in March 2009.

• **Top:** A recent pennant match on the four-rink 'international' indoor green.

• **Above Left:** Bowlers and visitors can refresh at the Parkview Café and Deck all day.

"We'll be keen to entice the producers of televised events to look positively at utilising the venue," Armstrong, the club chairman, said recently.

"Bowls Australia, who fund most of the bowls we see on TV, is based in Melbourne; Victorians are renowned as the keenest sporting spectators in the country; and we have the nation's most modern indoor bowls facility right here in Melbourne.

"Similarly, the ABC, who produce all Australian televised bowls, is just up the road.

"Logically and logistically, it would seem to be the perfect scenario for major indoor events to be hosted here."

Alongside the imposing building sits a conventional eight-rink turf green, while the space for an



other eight-rink grass green is prepared and ready for a future phase of the club's development.

A magnificent function room with seating capacity for 300 diners looks out over Dendy Park, as does the Parkview Café and Deck, where bowlers and visitors can enjoy meals, refreshments and freshly brewed coffee all day.

The complex also houses the 'Resting Toucher' pro shop, one of the biggest and most professional bowls and bowls accessories stores in Victoria and operated by respected retailer Geoff Maskell - a champion international bowler in his own right - and



• **Above:** International representative Geoff Maskell operates the 'Resting Toucher' bowls specialist store inside the stadium.

• **Top:** Diners in the venue's function room can enjoy unparalleled views of historic Dendy Park.

• **Left:** Armstrong (centre) and international stars Steve Glasson, Lee Schraner, Joyce Lindores and Kelvin Kerkow on the eight-rink indoor green.

is open to the general public seven days a week.

Bowlers, shoppers, visitors and friends are welcome to pull into any of the venue's 150 car parking spaces - located adjacent to the club's main entrance - where an open-armed welcome to visit Australia's new world class lawn bowls complex is extended to everyone.

Likewise, those interested in this year's winter competitions and pennant at the stadium are invited to contact the club on 8520-9600 for more information.

And as for Ken Armstrong, sadly the club couldn't arrange a statue to be erected on the Nepean Highway alongside Sir Thomas, so they recently honoured him with a well-deserved Life Membership for his selfless contribution.

- David Allen