



▲ A sunny welcome for visitors to the **Ramsgate Bowling Club** in **Kent**, formed in 1929 and with a dashing Art Deco gate to match.

As a small plaque on the gate informs passersby, the club's two greens were actually laid in 1924.

This was as part of a scheme by Ramsgate Corporation to boost the town's appeal by building a new road linking up the old town to the, as yet undeveloped, chalky cliffs to the west.

Overseen by the architects John Burnet and Partners, this new Royal Esplanade can be seen in the postcard from the mid 1920s (*top right*). Part-financed by the government, it opened in 1923.

As was the pattern established at other resorts (see *page 130*) the coastal side of the Esplanade was divided into sections; for public lawns, for croquet and for bowling.

This work, which required a considerable amount of engineering and landscaping, was completed in 1924 at a staggering cost of £160,000. However the plan was to recoup this by a development on the inland side of the Esplanade (that is on the right of the postcard).

To kick start this, the Corporation spent another £63,000 acquiring 76 acres of the Westcliff House estate and various adjoining plots, before commissioning architects Franklin & Deacon to design an

estate on what was billed as 'the most perfect building site on the south coast'.

At the same time, two structures by Basil Deacon bookended the lawns and greens; at the west end, the Westcliff Lift, at the east end an Italian Renaissance bandstand and tea pavilion (now a bathing pool). Thus intending buyers into the estate could see that the amenities were already in place when the first houses were completed in 1929.

Today this grand vision is still very much in evidence.

Least altered is the pavilion of **Ramsgate Croquet Club** (*centre right*). Like Mawson's pavilion at South Tawton it has a viewing area on the roof, accessible from and at the same level as the Esplanade.

Its identical twin is the bowls pavilion. As can be seen (*below right*) an extension now obscures the frontage. However as it does not compromise the core structure, this has not prevented the building being listed Grade II, as is its croquet counterpart.

Together with the Westcliff Lift and tea pavilion, the croquet and bowls pavilions form part of the Royal Esplanade Conservation Area, a perfectly balanced example of 1920s planning, enticing to holidaymakers, yet equally desirable as a place in which to live.

Best time to visit? The club hosts a two-week open tournament in late July and early August (partly why that extension is so necessary).

However not all in Ramsgate is sunny. Cutbacks have meant that the bowls club might find itself liable for repairs, a prospect increasingly faced by clubs on public greens.

Exposed to the sea air, in a listed building, in a Conservation Area – that represents quite a challenge when all you really want is to play bowls and watch the ships sail by.



▲ Three inter war postcards illustrate how town planners in other resorts placed bowling greens in as central a location as possible; indicative of the game's status in early 20th century popular culture, and also of how greens brought life and colour to the townscape.

Seen above is one of two greens laid in the 1920s on **Marine Parade** in **Great Yarmouth**.

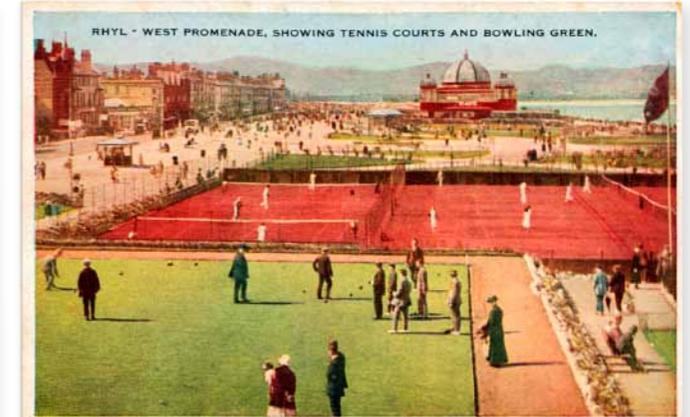
Before these, Great Yarmouth's principal green for visitors had been in the privately run Vauxhall Gardens, created a century earlier.

The prominent building seen in the postcard is the **Royal Aquarium**.

Built in 1876 opposite the entrance to the Britannia Pier, it failed as an attraction and in 1883 was converted into a theatre, and then a cinema, which it remains.

Bowling meanwhile has not only stayed in fashion but become an integral part of the local economy.

The two greens above have been joined by three more, forming a line on North Drive. Together these host Great Yarmouth's annual **Festival of Bowls**, which since 1945 has taken place over four weeks in September and currently attracts over 1,800 entrants, making it the largest bowls event in Britain.



(On the inland side of North Drive, incidentally, is the Wellesley Recreation Ground, home to one of the oldest grandstands in Britain, built in 1890-91, a tennis pavilion and ticket booth, all listed and all designed by Yarmouth's Borough Engineer from 1882-1922, JW Cockrill, who almost certainly oversaw the layout of the Marine Parade bowling greens too.)

At Great Yarmouth and at resorts across Britain, a significant impetus for holding summer bowls tournaments was the 1938 Holidays with Pay Act. This guaranteed all workers one week of paid leave between May and October.

The success of such tournaments also helps explain why bowling greens in certain resorts have outlived most other attractions.

**Even at seaside towns where level ground is at a premium, as at Ilfracombe, north Devon (left), a bowling green was still considered an essential. This was for holidaymakers. Locals had their own club inland, formed in 1893. The greens seen here still exist as public gardens, but since the buildings on the right have been cleared the setting is quite altered.**

A case in point is **Rhyll** in **Wales** (*above*). Seen here in the 1920s, next to red shale tennis courts, are two greens (one only just visible) on the East Parade (not the West, as stated on the postcard), with **Rhyll Pavilion** in the distance. The pavilion was replaced in 1991 but the greens live on. Indeed there are now three; one home to the **East Parade BC**, two for public use. One of the greens has a bank of seats, a leftover from when the East Parade served briefly as the **Welsh National Crown Green Bowling Centre**.

Inevitably one of the issues now facing greens such as in Great Yarmouth and Rhyll is that whereas once they were continually monitored by attendants, today they are more vulnerable to vandalism and to casual mis-use.