

Melbourne Orchard

Whilst looking around at the History of Blackheath and Greenwich I came across a name I had never heard of in the Club, Melbourne Orchard.

So who was Melbourne Orchard.

He was born in Ballarat, Victoria, Australia in January 1878 (Source; Australia, Birth Index, 1788-1922) as an identical twin son of the Reverend John Orchard and Susan (née Pearce) and was their 12th child of 13. Ballarat is about 60 mile west of Melbourne. His parents moved to Australia in 1863 so his father could carry out missionary work.

His parents, with nine of their children, moved to New Zealand in 1886. When he left school in 1894 Melbourne was sent to England to train as a Tailor. He then returned to Christchurch to open his own business.

By 1898 Melbourne was back in Christchurch where he reported the theft of “ *a brown check mackintosh with sleeves and cape, chain tab, dogs’ head fastening in front, brown-bone buttons, some odd arm-loops inside cape, brown-check lining, nearly new*” valued at £3. That’s equivalent to about £128 pounds today. Albert George Weippert was arrested and sentence to two months for this and four other offences. But Melbourne never got his mackintosh back. (source; New Zealand Police Gazette Vol 22, Issue 14, 6 July 1898). At that time Melbourne was a Salesman of Latimer Square, Christchurch.

The 1901 census of England and Wales shows him now living at 1 Grenville Street, St Pancras. This was a boarding house in which there were some other New Zealander’s boarding. He was at that time working as a Warehouseman. Melbourne had moved back to New Zealand by 1904 in which year he married Evelyn Lacey Tinsley (source; New Zealand, Marriage Index, 1840-1937).

In 1904 he was in New Zealand and appointed to the Customs Department as a Drapery Expert, retiring 4 years later to establish an Auctioneers and General Agency Partnership. (Source; Taranaki Daily News 20 May 1904).

His Mother died in 1906 (source; New Zealand, Death Index, 1848-1966) His Father died a year later (Source; New Zealand, Cemetery Records, 1800-2007).

The first mention found of him playing bowls is in July 1911 for Devonport Bowls Club, which is still there at 20 Cambridge Terrace, Devonport, North Shore 0624, New Zealand. Just across from Auckland. He won what was called the “Progressive Pairs” tournament as a lead. This seems to be what we would call a “spoon” drive but with a difference. A New Zealand paper, the Bruce Herald, in 1911 described it as follows

“The modus operandi of this form of play is that the winning pairs advance onto the next rink, but instead of being associated in the next game the winning lead plays for the losing skip.”

And we think we make bowls complicated!

Melbourne became Secretary of the Devonport BC for the Northern Bowling Association in 1912.

His Tailor Shop was broken into in 1918, there was no money left in the shop and they only got away with a deed box. (Source The Star (Christchurch 4 July 1918)

Melbourne's bowling seems to have got better as he can be found competing in numerous tournaments from 1911 to 1919 in New Zealand. Playing for the Devonport BC in Auckland and then moving to Christchurch BC. The clubs played a lot of what they term "Pennant" matches in the Auckland Region. These seem to be the equivalent to our Private League Club matches. He also won the Champion of Champions Rink competition in March 1915, playing at three, for Christchurch BC. (Source; The Lyttelton Times, 29 March 1915). In 1919 he won his Clubs Singles and Clubs Championship Rink competitions. (Source; The Press, Issue 16464, 6 March 1919)

By October 1919 he was in England. He and Evelyn were living at 47 Stanbury Road, Camberwell. (Source; London, England, Electoral Registers, 1832-1965). He won the third ever staging of the "Thomas Cup" in 1921 which was an invitation singles organised by the English Bowling Association (EBA). (Source; Daily Herald 18 Sept 1923). The competition was for national, county and local association's winners, and winners of open tournaments. The latter gives a clue to Melbourne's bowling preferences. He defeated the previous year's winner D Irvine Watson 21-16. The same year he won the Temple BC Championship beating Tom Dower 21-20 (Source; The Sportsman 13 Aug 1923). It is not surprising that he joined Temple BC as it was only about 3 miles from his home in Stanbury Road.

In a report on the three day championship final in 1925 of the London and Southern Counties Bowling Association (L&SCBA) for the "Gold Trophy presented by Lord Lonsdale", Melbourne is described as the holder. Which I presume to be the Lonsdale singles title as the article goes on to say that he lost to the Gold Badge Holder, H Stubbs in the final of the Gold Badge. (Source; Daily Herald 13 July 1925). Contradictorily the previous year The Sportsman of 24 July 1924 reports at Temple BC, Melbourne Orchard lost the final of the Gold Badge to A Warner (Belmont Streatham) 21-16.

*The London and Southern Counties Bowling Association (L&SCBA) on its website honours list states that Melbourne won the Lonsdale (representing Temple Fortune) in 1924 * and was runner-up in the Gold Badge (representing Temple) in the same year. He cannot have been a member of both as Temple is in Surrey and Temple Fortune is in Middlesex. I have written to L&SCBA asking for clarification as if this was possible at that time. A further mystery is that in 1949 an M Orchard * representing Alford was runner-up in the Gold Badge (Source; London & Southern Counties Bowling Association, Gold Badge/Lonsdale See Year Book, <http://www.lscbowlers.co.uk/golddbqhistory.html>) The only Alford Bowling Club currently listed in England is one in Lincolnshire, which County is unlikely ever to have been affiliated to L&SCBA.*

Melbourne was included in the 1926 EBA national trial between North v South. (source; Portsmouth Evening News 21 July 1926) He was then selected to play for England and this was the first of three caps the others being in 1927 and 1928. (Source; Kent County Bowling Association Handbook). He was also selected to play in the English Counties Championship (Middleton Cup) for Kent.

He was in the England team that played in 1926 International Tournament which was played in Belfast between the four home nations. He playing third to W Taylor (Surrey) in fact the whole rink played for Surrey clubs (Source; Northern Whig, 13 and 17 July 1926). England won the series winning two of their three games. The same year He also played in the English County Championships (Middleton Cup) for Surrey at third with W Taylor as his skip. They won their rink 21-17 and Surrey won the match. (Source; Croydon Advertiser and East Surrey Reporter 12 June 1926). He is in the Kent County Bowling Association Handbook as having played to England as a Kent bowler in 1926/27 and 1928. So it is odd to find that he is shown as a Surrey bowler in this newspaper report. There is a report in the Western Daily press, 22 June 1926, giving results in the Western Open Championships in which Melbourne played out of Temple BC. Still got to work this mystery out. Sometime during the off season in England he returned to New Zealand where he played in various competitions.

Melbourne, who now was representing Forest Hill BC, won the 1927 Kent Singles at Bat and Ball BC (Source; Kent County Bowling Association Handbook), in those days called the single handed championship, beating C Walton (Faversham) 21-17 (Source; East Kent Gazette 6 Aug 1927). He went on to reach the semi-finals of the English Nationals Championships (Source; Kent County Bowling Association Handbook).

At Forest Hill BC he became their singles champion in 1928 (Source; Forest Hill BC "100 years on" a Centenary booklet). This year he also played for Kent against the Australian Tourists at the Grove (Source; Kent & Sussex Courier 8 June 1928) and the New Zealand team at Tunbridge Wells BC (Source; 2 June 1928) He organised the 1928 tour by Australians and New Zealand teams. During the tour they were guest of Sir Francis Alexander Newdigate Newdegate, GCMG at Arbury in Nuneaton in Warwickshire. It is my belief that this may have been a joint tour by visitors. He had previously organised a tour to New Zealand by an England team (Source: Waiakato Independent 16 June 1925)

Melbourne was a keen tournament player. Being a regular at several that took place around the country. Hastings and St Leonard, Weston-super-Mare, Llandrindod Wells, Paddington, Tunbridge Wells, Richmond and Ayr in Scotland, to name a few. He had varying success but his presence always appreciated by the organisers.

He was in Australia in 1931 on a private visit.

It appears that He joined Blackheath and Greenwich about 1937. The Yarmouth Independent of 11 Sept 1937 in a report states that Melbourne, representing Blackheath and Richmond, was playing in their Open Singles. Interesting as seven days later the same newspaper reports that M Orchard (Blackheath & Greenwich) beat George Boston (Catford BC) in the final of the same tournament. He was also part of the rink that won their final as well.

In May 1938 he is playing in a event to open a new bowling green at Alexandra Hotel, Grangetown, Bridlington. This was a 2 rink indoor green and Melbourne was working for Taylor-Rolfe who laid the carpet. (Source; Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette 11 May 1938). It is no longer there as the hotel was demolished in the 1970's.

Kent and Sussex Courier of 20 May 1938 reports on a defeat by the Grove BC over Blackheath and Greenwich by 80 – 37 in a three rink match. Melbourne was one of the losing B&G skips at the Grove. Mr Hobbs from the Grove also congratulated B&G member William Tysoe Charlton on being elected President of Kent CBA for the current season.

The Middleton Cup match in 1938 Kent played Surrey at Blackheath and Greenwich. Melbourne was one of four B&G men in the match which Kent lost by 131-111. (Source; Kent & Sussex Courier 10 June 1938). The other B&G players were H V Kay, F Wood and H O Bristow, all who played on the same rink but lost 23-22. Melbourne skipped a rink of international players and won 22-18. His team were T C Hills (Bellingham), W W Bucknell (Callenders) and W R Mclver (Eltham). (Source; Kent County Bowling Association Handbook).

August 1938 was a busy month he played in a singles tournament in Ayr, Scotland at the beginning of the month. Then the Tunbridge Wells open in the middle of August. The end of the month found him playing in Wales in the Llandrindod Wells tournament. And he didn't win in any of them.

He was opening another indoor green in December. This time it was a new green in Boston Lincolnshire (Source; Boston Guardian 14 December 1938). Melbourne spoke as the opening ceremony as the representative of Taylor-Rolph who laid the carpet he then went on to play skip a rink in an exhibition against a rink skipped by Harry Stubbs. He also presented the Chairman of the Club Directors Mr Frank Pilcher with an inscribed silver jack.

The Daily Herald of 29 May 1939 reports * Melbourne Orchard as playing in the L&SCBA Gold Badge but losing in the first round 21-19 to J Olden (Preston, Brighton). In this year's Middleton Cup Kent again lost to Surrey 119-109 Melbourne Orchard (B&G) won 24-1. He made the headlines in same newspaper the next day "*Surprise Defeat of Blackheath Pair*" records the first round exit of himself and J Oliver. The L&SCBA *Lonsdale Tournament* of the this Orchard lost in the second round 21-16 to S Webber (North London) (Source; Daily Herald 28 and 29 June 1938).

"Orchard has played for New Zealand and Australia, and afterwards played for England in 1926, 1927 and 1928. He is also a winner of the E.B.A. championship, and the championship of five clubs of which he has been a member" so goes a report by the Portsmouth Evening News of Friday 21 July 1939 on Melbourne's defeat of a local bowler George W A Wright in the sectional finals in the Southsea Open Bowls tournament. It must have been quite a sensation as it made a very large headline on the sport page, **G.W.A. WRIGHT IS OUT OF SOUTHSEA TOURNY.** Making his first appearance, and shown as still a member of B&G, at Southsea Melbourne, who is 61 years old, went on to win the title beating C P Cross (Cosham) then being presented with a silver replica of the trophy and £10.10 shillings (£10.50p now but worth today £460) (source; Money Sorter www.moneysorter.co.uk). With T Machon he was runner up in the Kent pairs to J Bethume and H J Underhill (Kemsley) (Source; Kent County Bowling Association Handbook).

A letter written by Orchard to the Portsmouth Evening News and published in full on 5 August. In which he points out that "*Bowling tournaments' have definitely come to stay*" going on to say that the organisers must keep abreast of the times. He finishes saying that the "*Southsea Bowling Tournament was an eye-opener to me*" and thanking the organisers. His address is given as 21 Tyrwhitt Road, London, SE4. This is confirm in the National Register of 1939 showing at this address in Lewisham with his Wife Evelyn E Orchard and his occupation as Sport Goods Commercial Traveller. (Source; Findmypast.co.uk)

It is reported on 10 May 1940 in the Portsmouth Evening News that Melbourne Orchard has again entered the Southsea Tournament. But there are no further reports, this must be due to the war and maybe they cancelled the event.

Nothing further can be found until 1944 in the Western Mail of 22 August indicating the showing Melbourne was back in action playing in the Llandrindod Wells tournament but from Paddington BC He lost in the second week of play to W G John (Treboeth) by a single shot. As a manager of Taylor-Rolph Co. he oversaw the relaying of the carpet at Boston indoor club during August 1945 (Source; Lincolnshire Standard and Boston Guardian - Saturday 11 August 1945). The following year he was back play in Llandrindod Wells but didn't progress very far. (Source; Western Daily Mail 22 and 28 August 1946).

He was to play in the EBA team to play at Boston Indoor BC. In August the EBA were playing Gloucester BA, Melbourne skipped but lost 29-10 and the EBA lost overall. (Source; Gloucestershire Echo - Wednesday 17 September 1947).

Sad news later that year when his Wife for 43 years died. (Source; Lincolnshire Standard and Boston Guardian - Saturday 29 November 1947)

Melbourne must have had great dedication not just to bowls but to those less fortunate than himself. He is reported to be taking part in a game of bowls between the Borstal Boys Bowling Association and Boston Indoor BC. The report does not say* which team he was in but includes the fact the he was the Publicity agent for Borstal Boys BA.(Source; Lincolnshire Standard and Boston Guardian Saturday 17 December 1949).

It appears that Melbourne had moved back to the Temple club by or before 1950, as there are reports of him playing in the Eastbourne open in June and the Leinster Open in Ulster in

August representing Temple BC (Sources; Eastbourne Herald 28 June 1950 and Irish Independent 24 August 1950). He was a guest at the St Edmundsbury BC annual dinner in December 1950 where he replied to a toast then sang as part of the evening entertainment. (Source; Bury Free Press (Suffolk) 15 December 1950). He appears to have been a very accomplished baritone singer. There are reports of him taking part in singing competitions when he lived in New Zealand.

At the Boston IBC he played for the EBA against the Club in March 1951 (Source; Lincolnshire Standard and Boston Guardian 10 March 1951). He then played for the EBA again but this time outdoors at Boston in August (Source; Lincolnshire Standard and Boston Guardian 18 August 1951). Then played at the 1953 Leinster Tournament and he partnered W Chapman in the pairs. Both being noted as from Temple. (Source; Belfast news 25 August 1951)

He was a guest at the St Edmundsbury BC annual dinner in the December of this year. Where it is reported that he spoke "*In the absence of Mr Alec Page, Past President of the EBA*" who did not attend due to fog. The report goes on to say *Mr Melbourne Orchard, Past President of the EBA., and a member of the Imperial Bowling Board replied*" (IBB forerunner of World Bowls). (Source; Bury Free Press (Suffolk) 12 December 1952.) I have not been able to find any evidence to corroborate this.

Later next year (1953) he played in singles and pairs in the Southsea Open and in August he was again playing in Leinster Tournament his pairs partner being P J Maguire both identified as from Temple (Sources; Portsmouth Evening News 10 and 22 July 1953 and Northern Wig 21 August 1953).

Melbourne Orchard's came to a tragic end at the age of 75, when in January 1945 he and his Cousin, Miss Vena (Lavina) Mead, who was 78, were knocked down in the road. His Cousin was killed instantly and Melbourne died three days later. They had both been to a whist drive at the Temple Indoor Bowls Club that day. His death was reported in several newspapers of the time. In the various obituaries, the Portsmouth Evening News said he was "*a member of the Alford and Temple clubs*". "*A member of the International bowling board*" is reported by the Bury Free Press. According to the Lincolnshire Standard and Boston Guardian he was "*manager of the firm Taylor-Rolph*" and was soon "*to have been made a director*" The Hampshire Telegraph stated the "*he was a member of the International Bowling Board representing South Africa though he was a New Zealander*" This further reference to Alford may be explained by the frequent mention of his activities in the Lincolnshire area but does not explain the somewhat confusing references to what clubs he was representing in the L&SCBA records.

He is described by a relation, who is a member of a well-known family history site and has posted his details this site as a "*a lovable rogue*" and that he "*Befitting his trade*" * was a "*natty dresser with a waxed moustache*". He was usually seen "*in a large homburg hat, a button hole and silver topped cane*" with his collie dog.

What cannot be disputed is that this man had a great love of the game of bowls and travelled widely to participate in the game. He appears to have made a huge amount to friends, and made an impression everywhere he went. Whether that was on the on or off the green.

He is one of a number of members of Blackheath and Greenwich of whom we should be rightly proud (even though his time with us was short) to say he was one of us.

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Blackheath & Greenwich Bowling Club
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With thanks to Tom Beesley for proof reading this.