

York and District Table Tennis Association – A History

By David Poole

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Foreword by John Farmery

I set up the first website for the York & District Association in 2000 so the seasons since then are well documented. In 2020, during the Covid lockdowns, I embarked on a project to collect and publish press cuttings, photographs, and material from handbooks prior to 2000, which can be found at <https://york.ttleagues.com/>

As part of this project I contacted David Poole, who played in the York League in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. David did a lot of research in the mid-1970s in the run-up to the Association's 50th anniversary in 1977. This included searching through the local press archives in York Library going back to the Association's formation in 1927 and before. David kindly lent me his notes, photographs and press cuttings for the project. In amongst this material were three articles written by him:

- "York & District Table Tennis Association". This covers the history of the Association from 1927 to 1970.
- "Men at the Helm": A biography of some of the Association's early administrators.
- "Personal Memories"

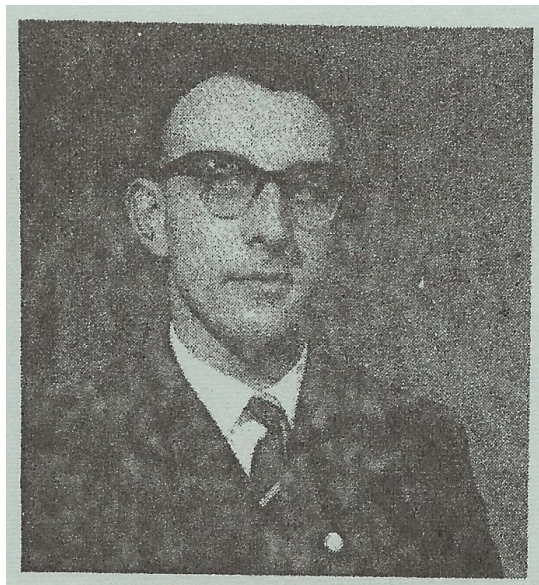
David gave me his permission to publish these articles. They were typed on A4 paper and so I scanned them and converted them to text. I have not changed the text, other than adding "1927-1970" to the title of the first article, but I have added some pictures.

As we approach the Association's centenary in 2027 I believe that these articles give a fascinating insight into the Association's first fifty years.

John Farmery
August 2025

About the author

David Poole was a prominent York table tennis player in the 1950s, 60s and early 70s. He was born in York in 1940. His first club was York Boys' Club, for whom he played two seasons in the Junior League from 1952 to 1954 before moving to the senior league, in which he progressed rapidly from Division 3 to Division 1 in successive seasons. In 1954-55 he won the first of two York Closed Juniors Singles titles. He moved to Railway Institute for the 1956-57 season to enable him to play in Division 1 and won 52 out of 57 (91%). He also won the Yorkshire Closed Boys' Singles title and represented Yorkshire in four county matches that season. The following season he moved to NALGO and topped the averages, losing only 1 out of 47 (98%). That season he also won the Bagshaw Trophy (handicap singles), York Closed Men's Singles, Junior Singles and his second Junior Doubles. During his time at NALGO he featured high in the averages, often over 90%. Despite this his team were relegated in 1962-63 before bouncing back as Division 2 champions the following season. He moved to Telephone Manager's Office in 1966 where he continued to feature high in the averages. He retired from playing after helping his team win Division 2 in 1972-73. David represented York in 18 Junior matches and 65 Senior matches.



David Poole

David is a local historian, researcher and genealogist. He has written and contributed to many articles on local people, events and places, many of which can be found in the Explore York Archives (<https://exploreYork.org.uk/archives/>).

York and District Table Tennis Association

1927-1970

Origins

Ping Pong has been played in England since the turn of the century, but for many years there was no governing body or national rules. A national Ping Pong Association was formed after the First World War but was slow to develop in the provinces, and it was not until April 24th 1927 that the English Table Tennis Association came into being.

York – The early years

The beginnings of the modern game of Table Tennis in York were almost certainly centred at the YMCA in Clifford Street, which was the hub of many youthful leisure and sporting activities.

The earliest found local Press report was on January 27th 1927 which recorded a friendly six-a-side match between the YMCA and "Visitors" (who were probably all local people as one of the team was WT Forsselius of the family who owned a garage in Blossom Street).

In the following month the YMCA lost to Huddersfield YMCA in the final of the Yorkshire YMCA Championship 443-611. The York team was FR Bulcock, GM Shacklock, WJ Davies, JT Dallas, G Bowling and R Taylor, each player playing one set of five games with the scores being aggregated. The Press report concludes by stating "because of the popularity of the game the YMCA will hold an individual tournament".

This tournament was duly organized and attracted 58 entries, amongst whom were Cyril Baxter, a stalwart of schoolboy sport who was to become a very popular Head of Tang Hall Junior School, Eric Bell, an excellent player and administrator until his untimely death at an early age, and Bert Keech, the well known personality and multi-talented sportsman. The championship was won by Nick Allison, an experienced player from Sunderland who was working temporarily in York. It seemed that he had little opposition from the comparatively inexperienced local players and in the final he beat Bert Keech 21-13, 21-14, 21-10.

Following the success of this tournament a meeting was held at the YMCA on October 7th 1927 at which representatives from 8 teams decided to form a league, which comprised of YMCA (2 teams), Centenary Chapel (2 teams), Peckitt Street Chapel, Holy Trinity, Deaf Institute and Melrose. The latter was an interesting club. Its secretary was Walter Hinchey and the home matches were played in a bedroom of his council house at 54 Melrosegate. At one end of the table the player had to stand with his heels on the fire-curb and it is even rumoured that the door-knob was removed to provide more space, Even a person of average build would be severely cramped in those conditions, but imagine the plight of Bert Keech who would at that time weigh at least 16 stones (in later years he would rise to over 22 stones).

YMCA 'A' were the first winners of the league, among their players being Bert Keech, Eric Bell and Roland Jakeman, a stalwart of the Association for over 40 years, principally as Hon. Treasurer. Melrose were runners-up. The YMCA won the County YMCA championship when they beat Huddersfield 541-310 to gain revenge for their defeat the previous season. The League individual champion was 17 year old Eric Bell - incredibly he would next win this title 23 years later at the age of 40.

In April 1928 Melrose entertained Whitby in a friendly match in Mr. Hinchey's bedroom. In those days Whitby was a strong-hold of the game - one of their women was the English Open Women's Singles Champion in 1926 - and they easily beat the York side. Their comments on the playing conditions are not known.

In the following season there were 7 teams in the league. Press reports were sparse and league tables have not been found, but it is assumed that the fixtures were satisfactorily completed. The County Championships were held at the YMCA in March 1929. A few local players, including Eric Bell and Roland Jakeman, entered but they were soon defeated.

During seasons 1929/30 and 1930/31 it appears that the league did not function. The reason for this apparent lack of interest may have been that there was a sizeable gap in the standard of play between the top and bottom teams, and in an individualistic game like table tennis it was probably a foregone conclusion who would win the league. Also, with only one division, there was nowhere for the bottom teams to be relegated to in order to get more compatible competition.

The above reasons look plausible when one looks at the regulations of the league when it was revived in 1931/32. A Press report of December 12th 1931 states: "The York Red Triangle Table Tennis League has been revised and is having a very successful season". Seven teams competed: YMCA (2 teams), Clifton, Deaf Institute, Melrose, Old Priory and Railway Institute. Each team was given a 'block' handicap and comprised of 6 players, each playing one set of 3 games, 21-up. All points were aggregated together with the block handicap, the team with the highest number of points being the winner. This method of play obviously gave the weaker teams some incentive, but in practice the league was won by the best club, Clifton (scratch handicap), who went through the season unbeaten. The individual championship was also handicapped and in the publication of the draw Eric Bell is described as the holder, which also points to the Association having been dormant since 1927/28 when Bell won the title. The championship was won by T. Dodds who beat Bert Keech (scratch).

The league expanded to 12 teams in 1932/33. Local players would not have to endure the council house bedroom because Melrose had withdrawn. New teams were YMCA 'C', Peckitt Street, St. Pauls, St. Chads, St. Barnabas and Northern Command. The block handicap system was again used but the league would review the initial handicaps after 5 matches, and indeed many were adjusted at that point. The League Secretary was RS Oloman, the Deaf and Dumb Commissioner for the City, who was to take an active role in the Association over 40 years, being elected as President in 1954 in succession to the late Bert Keech. The Deaf Institute were league champions playing to a handicap of +180.

In February 1933 there was a three-way exhibition series between York, Whitby and Pontefract at the YMCA in aid of the Malton Typhoid Relief Fund (older readers may remember this as a serious epidemic which claimed many lives). The star performance came from Bert Keech who narrowly lost 21-19, 14-21, 19-21 to B Hookins who three years earlier had represented England in the World Championships.

1933/34 saw an increase to 15 teams, St. Barnabas, St. Chads and Peckitt Street withdrawing. New entrants were New Earswick and Leeman Road Adult School with additional teams from Old Priory and Northern Command. New Earswick won the title at their first attempt with a handicap of +160. They were to become one of the stalwarts of the Association over many years. Eric Bell (-2) won the individual handicap after beating John Moor (+9) 93-91 over an aggregate of 5 games.

At this point let us reflect on the standard of equipment in those early days. The late Eric Bell wrote a short article in the Association's Silver Jubilee hand-book in 1952 and he recalls: "Half of the bats in use in 1927 were plain wooden ones. Of the other half, some were covered with sandpaper, cork, suede leather or thin flat rubber. A very few were covered with pimpled rubber, but it was only a short time before most players appreciated the advantage of this covering. I recall the table which some enthusiast had attempted to rejuvenate by covering the playing surface with linoleum and the club room which was illuminated by a flickering gas mantle. Best quality balls cost 2d.

In 1934/35 the league declined to 12 teams and AE Tebb was the secretary. A significant alteration was that the team handicap was replaced by each player being given a personal handicap to be applied each time he played. Leeman Road were champions but it is not certain if the individual championship was played.

The next season saw the league at its largest size to that date with 14 teams, the influx of new clubs including Boys Club, Terrys, School of Commerce and Tang Hall, a club which was to some degree a successor to Mr Hinchey's Melrose. They played in the Tang Hall Hotel and were to become the outstanding local side in the immediate post-war era. The School of Commerce were, as the name implies, a very youthful side and they had a marvellous season, winning 24 of their 26 matches to take the title by 1 point from Deaf Institute. The

team provided the baptism for three players who would secure their own places in the history of the Association. Brothers Dick and Bill Shaw were destined to join Tang Hall in the post-war era, winning a host of local titles as well as representing York on many occasions. George Bagshaw, who lost his life in the war, is perpetually remembered in the trophy, donated by his family, which bears his name. However, the leading Commerce player at that time, the one with the lowest handicap, was Albert Questa who has kindly supplied copies of all Press cuttings during this season. The achievement of the champions was all the more meritorious in that they did not have a home base and so had to play all matches away.

On January 21st 1936 a Press report notes that J Farmer (New Earswick) beat Bert Keech (YMCA) 18-21, 21-16, 21-20, "the only defeat Keech has suffered in any league match since the formation of the league". Whilst this must be taken as a statement of fact, it is not sure if this means the formation of the league in 1927 or the revived league in 1931, In any case this record can only be described as formidable, but Bert was now 50 years of age and his superiority was being eroded by some of the younger players.

An innovation on 14th May 1936 saw the first annual supper being held at the Davy Hall which incorporated the final of the handicap tournament, in which D Shaw (+5) (Commerce) beat Ron Russell (+12) (YMCA) 105-81. In two exhibition matches C Dale beat Bert Keech 31-25 and Bill Shaw beat brother Dick 31-29. The gathering was helped to go with a swing by Bert Keech who was brilliant on the piano, just one of the many talents which this extraordinary man possessed.



BERT KEECH
(Bootham)
Yorkshire & E.B.A. Singles Champion 1945

FOR THE LAST TWO YEARS AND A HALF, CARTOONS OF FOOTBALLERS, CRICKETERS, THEATRICALS, DARTS PLAYERS ETC., HAVE BEEN THAUST UPON YOU.

THIS IS SOMETHING NEW ON ME — AND YOU — R. STAVERS OLOMAN.

TABLE TENNIS

TO A TABLE-TENNIS FAN, PING-PONG IS JUST AN OLD CHINESE CUSTOM, OR DEITY, OR NAME OF AN EMPEROR MANY YEARS DEAD.

I USED TO THINK THAT TENNIS, GOLF, DARTS, BILLIARDS AND SHOVE HALFPENNY WERE EASY — UNTIL I SAW THE GAMES PLAYED PROPERLY.

TABLE TENNIS IS ANOTHER ONE OF THESE GAMES THAT I'LL NEVER TRY TO EXCEL AT.

Gay



D. SHAW AND RON RUSSELL



GAY'S IMPRESSIONS AT THE FINAL GAMES AND FIRST ANNUAL SUPPER OF THE YORK RED TRIANGLE TABLE TENNIS LEAGUE, held at the Davy Hall, where he presented the prizes.

A piece from the Press showing impressions of R Stavers Oloman, D Shaw and Ron Russell at the Association's first annual supper in 1936

Season 1936/37 saw the league increase by 6 teams to 20 and it was decided to form two divisions. The handicapping system in matches was abolished and it is likely that the previous season's individual handicaps would be used to determine which teams would play in Division 1. Teams were of 5 players each playing 1 set of 5 games, the result depending on the number of games won. Playing for the Boys' Club 'B' team was Denis Corner who is still participating 50 years later. Final league tables have not been found but it is almost certain that YMCA would be league champions, and there was a tie at the top of Division 2 with a play-off required between the Settlement and Clifford (the YMCA's other team). The Individual Handicap attracted 55 entries, the lowest handicap being -7 and the highest +5. The entrants certainly got their money's worth, as each match consisted of 10 games, 5 at home and 5 away, with the aggregate points deciding the winner. Unfortunately the results of this championship have not been found.

In the Autumn of 1937 the YMCA club moved premises to Grange Garth and changed their name to Grange, and the York Gas Company were new entrants. Settlement 'A' and Railway Institute (for whom the Shaw brothers were now playing) were vying for the championship. In fact play-offs were required to determine the champions of both divisions, but these did not take place until the opening of the following season. Railway Institute won Division 1 after beating Settlement 'A' 11-4 and Clifford won the Division 2 title when defeating Settlement 'B' 12-3.

In the final season before the war curtailed organized activities new teams included Three Tuns Inn and Old Parkgrovians. For some reason Three Tuns were immediately placed in Division 1 and in their team was George Race, who many older enthusiasts will remember as one of the league's characters when he played for St. Olave's in the 1950s. For the second successive season play-offs were necessary in both divisions. Railway Institute retained the championship when beating Grange 8-7 after trailing 6-0. There was a three-way tie in Division 2, with Acomb Adult School emerging on top after beating Tanghallians 8-7 and Old Parkgrovians 10-5. The individual handicap attracted about 50 entries, the winner being R Jenkins (+6) (Centenary) who beat Dick Shaw (-7) 98-58. An individual championship was also organized and it appears to have had 8 entries with each competitor meeting every other. Dick Shaw and W Greenstreet each won 6 matches, Shaw finally winning the final match 21-19, 16-21, 21-17.

DEAF INSTITUTE faltered badly in their bid for the championship of the York Red Triangle Table Tennis League. They were defeated by their nearest rivals, School of Commerce, who now head the league, and then Deaf Institute further jeopardised their chances by playing a drawn game with Old Priory B.

Against School of Commerce, Deaf Institute had to concede 48 start. H. Paylor, going on first, did well to beat A. Walker, 21-13, 21-10 and 17-21. C. R. Dale and J. R. Shaw had a stern fight for the home man to win by one point. A Pickering, going on next against D. Shaw, was two points up after two games, but collapsed against the stonewall tactics of Shaw and lost 21-5 in the third set.

The visitors' lead was therefore 45 when R. S. Oloman opposed D. Hutson, and by steady play he won 21-18, 21-5 and 21-16 to make the lead only 22. L. Stringer started in dashing style against A. Questa, winning 21-9, but the following two games were more tensely contested, each player taking one at 21-20. R. E. Jakeman was then faced with the task of taking 10 points from W. Shaw, but the visitor proved to be in too strong a position and won 21-9, 21-13 and 20-21.

Details:—

Deaf Institute		School of Commerce	
C R Dale (scr) ...	58	J R Shaw (18) ...	57
R E Jakeman (9) ...	43	W Shaw (18) ...	62
L Stringer (15) ...	62	A Questa (15) ...	50
R S Oloman (21) ...	63	D Hutson (24) ...	39
A Pickering (21) ...	44	D Shaw (27) ...	58
H Paylor (18) ...	56	A Walker (30) ...	44
Handicap ...	84	Handicaps ...	132
	413		442

A report and scorecard of a top-of-the-table match in 1936 between Deaf Institute and School of Commerce shows how the scoring system worked

And so we come to the end of an era. The great majority of players would be involved in the war effort. Some, like George Bagshaw, would lose their lives. Many others would re-emerge to fulfil their potential.

Post-War

It was not until January 1947 that the league resumed with 12 teams, the number of players and method of deciding matches being the same as pre-war. The Shaw brothers had now joined Tang Hall and this club would dominate the scene for the next six seasons.

The most interesting new club had a fascinating title – IADOM - which stood for “It All Depends On Me”. They played in St. Hilda's Church Hall, Tang Hall Lane, and although they finished next to bottom of the league they had one outstanding player. Ken Park of Leeds was serving in the Army locally was probably unbeaten in league matches and took the individual championship after narrowly beating Bill Shaw (the individual handicap competition had been discontinued). He subsequently had a very long and distinguished career in the Leeds league, representing Yorkshire on many occasions, additionally being involved in County administration.

A few weeks after the league got under way there was sufficient demand for a second division of 10 teams to be formed, although there was only time for each team to play each other once. Tang Hall 'A' were easy winners of Division 1 - they were probably unbeaten but absence of final tables cannot confirm this - and New Earswick 'B' finished top of Division 2.

There were various exciting innovations in season 1947/48 which were certain to improve the standard of play, stimulate interest and widen horizons. Firstly, the Association affiliated to both the Yorkshire and English TTA (affiliation had been made to the ETTA in 1927 when it was one of only nineteen leagues to do so, but it is not known how long this affiliation had been maintained). Secondly, teams would comprise of four players each playing 2 sets. In all previous seasons no player had played more than one set per match - it is amazing that participants had been happy with this arrangement for so long. Thirdly, a doubles event was added to the individual singles competition and lastly, the Yorkshire TTA introduced the inter-league competition although it was played on a knock-out basis for its first two seasons. It would not become a league based competition until 1949/50.

Another feature this season was the start of the influx of Services teams which would continue to grow and last for the next 12 seasons, introducing many excellent players from various parts of the British isles, but as the personnel involved were invariably national servicemen, their time in the York area was restricted to a maximum of two seasons. Army Movements and 64 Croup RAF joined the league, the latter being successful in winning Division 2.

League champions Tang Hall were further strengthened when Ken Park joined them, but only for a short time because in December he was posted to Woolwich. Eric Bell was the new Association Secretary and a Press report of October 18th 1947 relates “Eric Bell, playing for Tang Hall 'A', made his first appearance in a league match since 1935”.

The first ever official inter-league match was in late November 1947 at Tang Hall Hotel against Scarborough, the team being Ken Park and the Shaw brothers. A ding-dong battle saw York defeated 4-5, Ken Park losing the final set 21-17, 17-21, 21-23.

Unbeaten Tang Hall 'A' easily retained their championship and their players also won both individual titles, Dick Shaw beat brother Bill in the singles and they teamed up to win the doubles, The finals were held at the Co-op Hall and there was an admission charge of 1/6d (7.5p) which was rather high, as in comparison the ground admission to a football league match was no more than 1/3d.

An explosion of interest in 1948/49 resulted in the biggest expansion in the association to date - 4 additional teams in the main league resulted in Division 2 being split into two sections. A women's league of 7 teams and a junior league of 12 teams in two sections were also formed. The family of the late George Bagshaw

gave a trophy to the Association and this would be played for as an individual competition. A women's singles event was introduced for which Bert Keech donated a trophy and a team knockout competition was inaugurated with a trophy supplied by Shepherds the jewellers.

Of the new clubs, Bootham Conservatives were the most prominent, developing into one of the backbone clubs with now almost 40 years continuous membership and accumulating many individual and team successes in that time. St John's College was another new entrant and like the Services teams, it was able spasmodically to produce young men of good class from various parts of the country.

In the Bagshaw competition, which attracted 45 entries, there was a major upset when a rank outsider, D Strangeway (Ma1ton Youth Club), "defended brilliantly" to beat both Eric Bell and Dick Shaw, but this form deserted him in the final where he fell easily to Bill Shaw. Bill also won the Men's singles by beating Dick and the brothers retained their doubles title - they were at this point a class above their rivals, The first, and eventual many times, women's champion was Janet Wilson (Terrys). Division 1 was inevitably won by an unbeaten Tang Hall 'A', and RAFA 'B' were champions of Division 2.

The County Association came up with a new conception in 1949 which would be warmly welcomed by the leading players from all areas. It was decided to amend the inter-league competition from a knock-out basis to a league, 4 players per team, thereby providing 6 or 7 matches per season against the best opposition from different towns. A comparable women's league was also formed. The initial mainstays of the York team were the Shaw brothers, Eric Bell, Harry Sedgewick and Peter Morrill. In the first match against Hull at Terrys the team lost but much interest had been generated, as it was reported that there were over 100 spectators. Later in the season Bridlington were defeated 9-1 but generally the team was no match for towns in the West Riding with larger populations.

In the individual finals, 40 year old Eric Bell won the Men's Singles after a mammoth struggle against Dick Shaw, the score being 23-21, 14-21, 17-21, 21-15, 21-18. This was an incredible win considering Bell's age and the fact that in the first game he was losing 15-20. And so he took the title for the second time, with an unbelievable gap of 23 years between the two. The Shaw brothers completed a hat-trick of doubles victories and Janet Wilson retained her singles title. Two new events, the women's and mixed doubles, were introduced and Mary Ellis was victorious in both. Needless to say Tang Hall were league champions but they did actually lose one match, possibly their first defeat in the post-war period.

And so dawned the 1950s - the new decade would see a gradual expansion of the league, there would be greater opportunity for inter-league competition, but the biggest revolution was to emerge at the end of the decade with the advent of the "sandwich" bat - but more of that later.

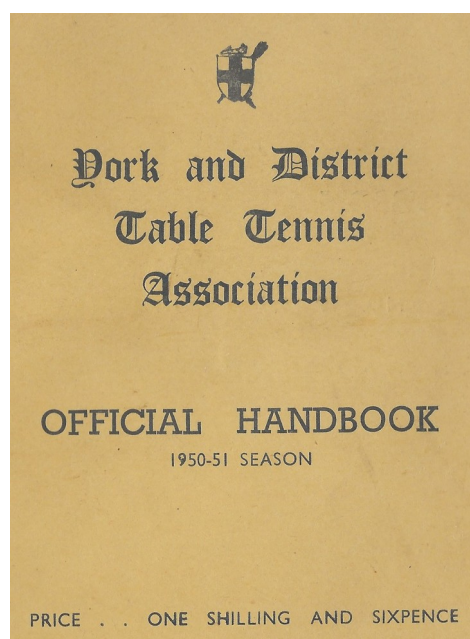
Season 1950/51 saw the arrival in York of Jack Senescall who had experience in the Huddersfield League. For the next 15 years he would make a great contribution to the Association, both on the table and in administration. Virtually an automatic choice for the York Men's 1st team, he was to win many local titles (as did his wife Betty) and he also held administrative posts at various times with both the Yorkshire and English Associations.

There was a small increase in team entrants. Division 3 which had been created the previous season was now split into two sections and the Junior League almost doubled in size. Unbeaten Tang Hall secured their fifth successive league title but it was to be the last they ever won - the next decade would be mainly dominated by the Railway Institute.

The Bagshaw Trophy was won by L Buxton, the first quality player to be associated with St. John's College. The individual competition finals were notable for the number of new faces appearing as opposed to the repetition of previous years. The Men's Singles champion was DK Williams, a Midlander serving locally in the Army, who beat Jack Senescall. Senescall and Les Senior won the Men's Doubles and Cynthia Wright beat Betty Senescall to take the Women's title. The first winner of the newly introduced Junior Singles event was Malcolm Huntington, who has since developed a reputation as a world-class tennis umpire and is

connected with many sports at a local level as a sports journalist with the Yorkshire Evening Press.

It is most probable that the season of 1950/51 was the first in which the annual Association handbook was produced - nowadays it is difficult to imagine being without one. They are certainly an invaluable source of useful historical information.



Cover of the 1950-51 Handbook

A major change in the 1951/52 season was in the composition of teams, the structure of which has remained basically the same for 35 years to date. The number of players in a team was reduced from 4 to 3, each player meeting every opponent, giving 9 sets in all. This change had two advantages - it enabled clubs to enter more teams and each player would enjoy increased participation in matches.

The Association broke another barrier when it supplied its first County players, both women, Jacky Pickering played once and Cynthia Wright played twice for the Yorkshire second team.

Among the new clubs were the RAF Stations at Full Sutton, Acaster Malbis and Rufforth. The league increased to 4 divisions, the latter having 2 sections. The season was a total success for Jack Senescall. He firstly won the Bagshaw Trophy after beating D Telford, a St. John' s College student who was currently playing for his home county of Durham. Jack went on to make a "clean sweep" of the individual events. He beat Les Senior to become Men's champion and these two retained their Doubles title. Jack then partnered his wife to win the Mixed Doubles.

The Railway Institute Junior team of Malcolm Huntington, Denis Martindale and Hugh Greaves was the first local side to reach a final of the County Club Championship, but they lost to Pontefract Community Centre, the venue being the Bay Horse Inn, Marygate.

Silver Jubilee

1952/53 was the Silver Jubilee season and the handbook included a short history by Eric Bell. He revealed that only Toby Ward and himself of the original 1927 contingent were still playing, with two other originals, Bert Keech and Roland Jakeman being President and Hon. Treasurer respectively. (Roland Jakeman would subsequently reappear for a few further seasons with St. Olave 's).

Unfortunately this would be the last contribution which Eric Bell would make as he died after a short illness in December 1952 at the very early age of 42. He was currently Chairman of the Association, having been Secretary in the first four seasons.

Twenty-five years ago . . .

In the early Spring of 1927, there appeared one day in the "Yorkshire Evening Press" an announcement of a table tennis singles competition to be run on "knock-out" lines during the following two or three months. The tournament, organised by the York Y.M.C.A. with the help of "Nick" Allison, a leading player from the Sunderland League who was working temporarily in York, was run in an attempt to stimulate sufficient interest in the game to enable a league to be formed in York and district. The venture was successful, and in October, 1927, the York and District Table Tennis League was an established fact.

Until he returned to Sunderland a few months later, Allison was the outstanding player, though there is no doubt that he would have been overhauled by two or three York players had he remained here another season. It cannot be denied, however, that his influence was one of the main factors—probably the primary factor—in the establishment of organised table tennis in York.

As may be expected, there is a vast difference between the table tennis we know now and the game as it was played in the League's first season. Half of the bats in use in 1927 were plain wooden ones, many of them with a polished surface. Of the other half, some were covered with sand-paper, others with cork, plain paper, suede leather, or thin flat rubber. A few—very few—were covered with the pimpled rubber we now regard as more or less essential, though it was only a short time before most players appreciated the advantages of that substance.

The player who in these days is dissatisfied with the playing conditions in some York clubs would literally be horrified if expected to play in some of the rooms, on some of the tables, or with some of the lighting (?) we cheerfully endured in 1927. Looking back on these "Dark Ages",

I recall particularly the table which some enterprising enthusiast had attempted to rejuvenate by the simple process of covering the playing surface with linoleum, and the spacious clubroom in which the sole means of illumination over the table was a flickering gas mantle giving a light of approximately 10 candle power. Nor must I omit the council house back bedroom in which the league runners-up played—where there was a space of 18 inches between one end line and the wall. At the other end the player stood with his heels on the built-in curb round the fireplace and with his back resting against the mantelpiece. Even the door knob was removed in an effort to obtain more playing space.

In that first year there were only eight teams in the League which was won by Y.M.C.A. "A". The Y.M.C.A., in fact, remained the hub of the League's activities for some 10 years and in spite of losing some of their best players to rival clubs, they invariably managed to field one of the strongest teams.

What of the players of the 1927-28 season? The years have taken their toll, and only two—"Toby" Ward and I—were still playing in league matches last season. Two others, however, are now connected with the Association in an official capacity—"Bert" Keech is our President and R. E. Jakeman our Honorary Treasurer.

In this, the Silver Jubilee year of the York and District Table Tennis Association, I hope I have been able to give the players who take part in the 1952-53 programme a quick glance at the birth and early infancy of the game in York. Before the curtains are drawn again on 1927, here are two more items of interest in connection with that year. Best quality balls cost 2d., compared with the present 1/3d. 19 leagues were affiliated to the English Table Tennis Association, which was formed in 1927, and five of them were from Yorkshire. Yes, one of the five was YORK.

A. E. Bell

Eric Bell wrote a piece in the 1952-53 handbook to commemorate the Association's Silver Jubilee

An interesting junior player of this period was Jim Ashman of Cookes. He played twice for the York Juniors but his acme of sporting success would come 25 years later when he would emulate the Association President, Bert Keech, in being capped many times for England at bowls. He was to make a short but successful table tennis come-back with Vickers in the early 1970s.

Jack Senescall retained the Bagshaw Trophy when he beat Les Senior, but Senior reversed this result in the Men's Singles semi-final, the title eventually being won by Kevin Bramham of the Railway institute who also played in the Leeds league. This was almost certainly the first time that the Closed championships had been held on one day, the venue being the excellent Railway Institute gymnasium. Previously competitors had mutually arranged ties in the early rounds up to the semi-final stage.

Railway institute 'A' were Division 1 champions for the first time after a play-off with Tang Hall. This was a watershed for both clubs - RI went on to become the outstanding club for the next decade but Tang Hall would never repeat their former glories, would soon lose their accommodation at Tang Hall Hotel and have problems with changes of home venues over the next few years.

This Silver Jubilee season coincided with the author's baptism in the Junior League playing for York Boys' Club. Memories are still vivid of long bicycle rides on cold dark winter nights to venues such as New Earswick and Bishopthorpe. The season was regarded as a personal success with an average of over 50%.

In the following season one or two men who had helped win the league for RI had become dissatisfied with conditions there (this action seemed to have some effect as conditions were greatly improved shortly after) and they formed a new club, Ebor, based at the Bay Horse Hotel, Marygate. They also secured the services of

two Scottish internationals, Alan Glass who was working at Rowntrees and John Braithwaite, a locally based RAF National Serviceman. As Jack Senescall was one of the dissidents who had moved to Ebor, this new club easily won Division 1. Jack went on to complete a hat-trick of Bagshaw Trophy successes after beating a young St. John's College student, GS 'Stan' Smith. Many readers will recall that, after a spell of teaching away from York, Stan returned to the College as a tutor in the mid 1960s, subsequently taking an active role in the administration of the Association.

This season saw a minor amendment to the format of play in matches when, in addition to the nine singles sets, one doubles set was introduced, any two of the three members eligible to play. This gave the possibility of a match being drawn as well as offering the only regular chance of competitive doubles play which was such an important part of Yorkshire League matches in which two doubles sets were mandatory. This method of play has now lasted unchanged for over 30 years and seems to be the best possible, with each player having the ideal amount of involvement in matches lasting about 2.5 hours. It is interesting to compare the pre-war scene when matches would be completed in no more than 1.5 hours with each player participating for about 15 minutes.

The opening of season 1954/55 was marred by the death in August of the Association President, Bert Keech at the early age of 47. Older sportsmen will remember him as a multi-talented larger than life personality of national renown.

This season saw a remarkable coincidence in that a third Scottish international joined the league. Monty MacMillan, a RAF National Serviceman, joined his fellow countrymen Glass and Braithwaite and together with Senescall they formed the nucleus of the York Men's team, but even they failed to gain promotion from Division 2 of the Yorkshire League.

The new President was RS 'Bob' Oloman who had played for the Deaf Institute as long ago as 1931 (he was the Deaf Commissioner for the city) and he was to remain an active President for the next 14 years. He also retained the position of Chairman to which he had succeeded on the death of Eric Bell.

The Railway institute playing conditions had been vastly improved to be as good as any in the city and so the short-lived Ebor club disbanded and the players returned to the RI, whose 4 teams completely dominated their respective divisions - the 'A' team were league champions with a 100% record and the 'B' team were runners-up in Division 1. Although RI were so dominant and only conceded 21 sets in 18 matches, it was Stan Smith of St. John's College who finished top of the averages with 90%.

The winners of Division 4 were St. Clave's 'B' for whom Roland Jakeman had made a come-back at just over 50 years of age. In those days, unlike now, there were few, if any, older players. 'Jake' finished second in the averages with 85%.

The Junior league was not formed this season, the teams involved being placed in an appropriate senior division. As one of those involved, the author certainly benefited, competing against a greater diversity of clubs and opponents and playing an increased number of matches.

During the season the old stalwart Dick Shaw developed cartilage trouble which virtually ended a career spanning over 20 years.

Monty MacMillan completed the double of winning the Bagshaw Trophy and the Men's Singles, and with John Braithwaite won the Doubles.

Betty Senescall had a bumper season, winning all three women's events.

The familiar pattern of turnover of talent continued in 1955/56. MacMillan and Braithwaite had departed to be replaced by an Army doctor from Manchester, Maurice Kendal, and RAF Linton based Trevor Foster who had experience in the Yorkshire league with Leeds.

For the third successive year Jack Senescall lost in the Men's Singles Final, this time to Trevor Foster. His wife Betty once again made a clean sweep in the women's events.



Some of the participants in York Closed, February 1956:

Back row: Maurice Kendall, Elaine Lodge, Trevor Foster, Janet Pears, Jack Senescall, Mary Ellis, Betty Senescall, Valerie Smurthwaite, D Howe, David Poole

Front row: Ian Farrar, John Lyon, Robert Plant, G Holmes, P Illingworth, A Stuart

There was an important change in the structure of the Bagshaw competition. Up to now it had been in effect a duplication of the Men's Singles event, with only a handful of entrants having any chance of success. In order to increase its popularity, it was decided to run it as a handicap competition with the initial stages being played in groups, giving everyone a minimum of 3 sets. In games of 31-up the highest handicap was usually +25 and the lowest handicap being scratch. This new thinking proved successful as the winner was Colin Littlewood (York Boys' Club) +25.

1956/57 will be remembered for the growing controversy over the "sponge" bat problem. The rules at that time allowed for bats of any size, shape or covering. Over the past year or so, sponge surfaces had been used by a small number of players (at this time the majority of eastern countries were using sponge extensively). Most coverings were about half an inch thickness although John Lyon played with about a third of an inch covering. These revolutionary bats did not of course turn an average player into a very good one, but they did usually produce better than normal results. The nature of games was also changed - these bats could impart far more spin than conventional surfaces, attackers could hit the ball harder, and rallies were comparatively quiet as sponge hitting the ball made no sound at all. In December 1956 the County Association called for a ban on all sponge surfaces and in the summer of 1957 the ETTA amended their rules to this effect. Only 8 countries took a similar decision - the rest of the world carried on as before and therefore at international level English players were obviously at a great disadvantage. At this time no one had thought of a "sandwich" surface.

But back to the local scene – the Railway Institute decided to split their very strong membership into two clubs, those who were not railway employees retaining the RI name and the railwaymen forming two teams called "British Rail Staff Association" which easily won the league title.

New ground was broken when the author became the first local male to represent the County with four appearances in the Junior team and "first ever" victories came in the Yorkshire Closed Championships when the author won the Junior Singles crown and Jack Senescall partnered Doug McGarry of Barnsley to win the Men's Doubles.

An innovation this season was a singles championship for each division except Division 1, thereby creating interest among many who had no chance of making much headway in the Men's Singles event. The result of last year's Men's Singles Championship was reversed this season with Jack Senescall beating Trevor Foster to become the first man since the war to win the Singles title more than once. These two teamed up to win the Doubles and Jack and his wife inevitably won the Mixed Doubles.

The Railway Institute Junior team of John Lyon, Eric Mortimer and the author emulated their predecessors of 5 years ago when reaching the final of the County Club Championship but were easily beaten by Sheffield Albion.

West Yorkshire Road Car Co. joined the Association in 1957/58 making a modest entry with one team, two of whom were making their competitive debuts when well turned 40 years of age. They easily won Division 4 with one of the veterans, George "Darkie" Elmer only losing 1 set out of 51. This club would develop into one of the stalwarts of the league, eventually reaching a peak of running 10 teams.

The Railway Institute dispensed with last season's idea of splitting the club into railway employees and others - all members were now back into one club and not surprisingly the 'A' team won Division 1 with a 100% record and the 'B' team were runners-up.

The Bagshaw Trophy final resulted in a win for the author (+2) over John Lyon (+1). The Men's Singles final was a repeat of the Bagshaw final, the author at 17 years of age being the youngest winner since Eric Bell in 1928. The most notable fact of this contest was that John Lyon had amazingly reached the final within 5 weeks of having an appendicitis operation, and he went on to win the Doubles with Jack Senescall. Janet Pears (nee Wilson) retained her Women's Singles crown - this was her fifth win in ten years. A Veterans Singles event was inaugurated, won by George Elmer (West Yorks) who beat his club colleague Jim Kirby.

The York Men's 1st team had an excellent season in Division 2 of the Yorkshire League, the best to date, winning 6 and drawing 1 from 7 games, but unfortunately were beaten for promotion on sets average.

Season 1958/59 saw the start of an acceleration in the game's popularity which would see the Association double in size over the next 7 years. Initially the league increased to 5 divisions and new teams included Heworth Cricket Club and Telephone Managers Office. St. John's College were strengthened by a new student, Bob Lowe who had represented his native Staffordshire, and he topped the Division 1 averages with 95%. Also worthy of a mention is Janet Pears who was a match for most men - she finished top of the Division 2 averages with 87%.

Railway Institute 'A' again had no serious challengers in the league. The Bagshaw Trophy Final brought together two scratch handicap men with John Lyon, the runner-up last year just getting the better of Jack Senescall. There was again very little change in the winners of the individual championships, Jack Senescall won the Men's Singles for the third time when beating Bob Lowe, and he retained his Doubles crown with John Lyon. Jack also won the Mixed Doubles with his wife for the sixth successive year. Keith Dunn won the Junior Singles against Malcolm Storey, who was to become better known as a very competent professional Rugby League forward with both York and Hull. Janet Pears celebrated her birthday in fine style. She retained her Singles title and also won the Ladies Doubles with Barbara Hudson.

The end of season dinner saw a special presentation of a wrist-watch to Jack Senescall to mark his 50 appearances for York in inter-league matches.

One of the most important changes in the history of the game was made in the summer of 1959, and the impact of this change cannot be over emphasised. For the past year or so the table tennis world had been split

between a minority of countries who had banned sponge bats and the majority who had retained them. A compromise rule had been agreed which banned pure sponge surfaces but sanctioned the 'sandwich bat'. In the early months of this new rule the majority of these new bats had had the pimples outwards, and it was some further time before the reverse pimple surface was developed to a popular acceptance. Its great advantages were soon widely acknowledged and the 'pimples outwards' surface virtually disappeared. There was of course a number of players, predominantly defenders, who never changed bats - 'sandwich' at that time had not developed to the point where one could buy attacking or defending surfaces and therefore most defenders found that the plain pimples rubber bat was best for them.

This season saw the arrival in York of one of the most colourful characters (no pun intended) to grace the local game in the post-war era. Francis Gregoire was a young West Indian from Barbados who had come to York as a student nurse. It took him a short while to get used to the local standard of play, but thereafter he lost very few games in his twelve seasons in the league, and he had the distinction of performing two separate hat-tricks of Men's Singles titles. His game was based on a very tight rock-like defence using a hard bat, although latterly he developed a hard-hitting attack which he used on occasion. A personal memory of Frank concerns his early days in York when he had not adjusted to the cold winters. He used to turn up for matches wearing two pairs of long trousers, one of which he removed for the duration of the match.

Stan Smith resumed his long association with the League when he returned to St. John's College as a lecturer.

The league had now extended to six divisions, with the outstanding performance being at the top of Division 3, where Heworth Cricket Club won all 18 matches with a sets average of 173-7. Alan Martindale won all his 50 games, Jeremy Dunnington lost 1 in 44, and Tom Williams, who had first played in the league for Co-op over 20 years before, lost 2 in 47.

In Division 1 Railway Institute were again unbeaten and were champions by a large margin, with Bob Lowe (St. Johns) topping the averages for the second season. There was a surprise in the Men's Singles final when Frank Gregoire beat Bob Lowe, who was therefore runner-up in both seasons he spent in York. Frank, who beat Senescall in the semi-final, was steadily improving and although at that point he had only played for the York Men's second team, this title win hastened his debut for the first team. Senescall and Lyon completed a hat-trick of Doubles wins but there was an upset in the Mixed Doubles when the Senescalls' long reign was brought to an end by Bob Lowe and Elaine Lodge.

The Association suffered a loss at the end of the season when work commitments took George Lodge and his wife to Darlington. During their ten years in York, between them they had filled various administrative positions, Elaine having been Match Secretary for the last seven seasons, George had been Competitions Secretary for six years and Yorkshire League Secretary for four. They left on a high note, holding three individual titles between them and typically, as a lasting gesture, they presented a trophy for the Division 6 championship.

This season had also seen the demise of RAF participation in the league. These teams had almost always been composed of national servicemen who were keen to continue their civilian sporting interests during their short period of service. The local game had benefited from an influx of players from many parts of Great Britain and no less than ten had represented York in Yorkshire League matches. However, national service was now being phased out and regular forces personnel did not seem to have much interest in the game. Personal memories of matches at Linton-on-Ouse in the mid 1950s recall travelling to the match by service bus, which meant that the match had to finish by 10pm in order to catch the last bus back to York. This venue had the distinction, as did St. John's College, of providing free refreshments during the game.

The 1960s

The new decade saw the acceleration in the popularity of the game. One contributing factor may have been the introduction of the sandwich bat - it is believed that, certainly in the lower divisions, these new bats meant that many players were able to develop a reasonable quality game without needing to produce the commensurate basic text-book strokes normally required when playing with plain pimples rubber.

The most notable talent to emerge in season 1960/61 was George Psorakis, a 16 year old whose game had a

leaning towards defence. He won the Bagshaw Trophy with a handicap of +2 and he also won the Junior Singles against Keith Dunn who was thus deprived of a hat-trick of titles. Gregoire retained his Men's Singles crown when narrowly beating Senescall and these two combined to win the doubles (Jack's usual partner, John Lyon, was injured). The Railway Institute Junior team (K Dunn, M Davison, N Thorn) reached the County Club Championship final for the third time in the last 10 years. Despite their opponents Mirfield RAFA having to play a man short and concede 5 sets, RI lost 5-4. In the Mirfield team was David Lamb who was a County senior player and who in a few months would become a St. John's College student and play a prominent part in York for the next two seasons.

Season 1961/62 again saw the Association strengthened with incoming talent. As well as David Lamb joining St. John's College, Railway institute secured the services of Clive Pollard, an experienced Yorkshire League player from Hull, and also his wife who had represented Yorkshire Juniors. Unfortunately they only stayed two seasons before returning to Hull, but in that time Clive was outstanding for the York Men's 1st team, winning 11 out of 12 sets in his first season and all 10 sets in his second, this form earning him selection for the County 2nd team.

Lamb chose to play for his native Dewsbury who were newly promoted to Division 1 in the Yorkshire league. This was understandable as he was the leading player in his home town and was unbeaten in the Yorkshire league the previous year. He lost little time in winning his first local title - with a scratch handicap he beat C Pogmore (+20) to win the Bagshaw Trophy. However, in the Closed Championships he was unable to stop Frank Gregoire completing a magnificent hat-trick of Singles titles.

The Ladies team in the Yorkshire League at last achieved success. Over the years their record had been very poor, some seasons being pointless with literally a handful of sets won. In those years there had only been one division and without any strength in depth they had been no match for the West Riding towns. Three years ago a second division was formed and this season the ladies won this division narrowly on sets average.

David Lamb retained the Bagshaw Trophy the following season when in a final of two scratch players he narrowly beat Clive Pollard. In the Men's Singles final he reversed last year's result by beating Gregoire over three games. The Closed Championships this year were notable in that it was the first time that Jack Senescall had not won a title since he first entered in 1951. He and John Lyon lost in the semi-finals of the Doubles and the Pollards beat him and his wife in the Mixed Doubles final.

The York Men's 1st team, for whom Gregoire, Lyon, Pollard, Senescall and Psorakis were the mainstays, secured promotion to Division 1 of the Yorkshire league for the first time ever, with Clive Pollard being unbeaten in 10 sets.

After 6 seasons as league champions, Railway Institute were toppled by Combined Hospitals 'A', whose regular team was Frank Gregoire, Len Godderidge and Geoff Stakes.

The Association had further expanded this season and now had 79 teams in 8 divisions.

In season 1963/64 the Bagshaw Competition was as popular as ever with about 100 entrants, and for the first time in 6 years the winner was a high handicap player, when David Lockwood (+22) beat Alan Postlethwaite (+6). It had become apparent over the years that any player with a middling handicap, between say +8 and +19, had almost no chance of ultimate success and that continued to be the case.

At the half-way point of the season the League Notes in the Yorkshire Evening Press listed the odds that Bob Plant, the well known local bookmaker and player, was giving on the following unbeaten players to maintain this record until the end of the season: Gregoire 2-1 (Div 1), Poole 10-1 on (Div 2) and Gawthrope 5-1 on (Div 5). Needless to say, this put an unconscious strain on the above players, because almost immediately Gregoire unbelievably lost to Betty Senescall and Poole was surprisingly beaten by Geoff Wilson. However Norman Gawthrope did remain unbeaten in 45 sets and Les Dunford in Division 8 did even better with 57 unbroken wins.

The feature of the Closed Championships was that it produced the most unexpected and least known Men's champion for many years. Nitin Shah, an 18 year old ranked as number 2 junior in India, was attending St. Peter's School. He had signed to play for Combined Hospitals but due to studies he had only played in 2 league matches in which he had lost to Lyon and Psorakis. He was obviously short of match practice, but in the Men's Singles semi-final he narrowly beat Gregoire and then produced a remarkable fight-back in the final. David Lamb won the first game 21-15 and with an 18-14 lead in the second game he seemed sure of retaining his title. Shah, whose game was based mainly on fast attack using an ordinary rubber bat, then took 7 points in a row to win the second game and secured the championship by winning the decider 21-15.

Lamb and Doug Utley beat Senescall and Lyon to win the Men's Doubles, but the Senescalls regained the Mixed Doubles title. This was the last trophy which Jack was to win as he retired from competitive play at the end of the season. He had amassed 3 singles, 10 Men's Doubles and 9 Mixed Doubles championships.

The York Men's 1st team had an unhappy baptism in Division 1 of the Yorkshire League. The promotion side had been weakened when Clive Pollard returned to Hull, and although David Lamb had chosen to play for York, the team could only draw one match and were relegated.

Bootham Conservatives won the first of what was to become 4 successive League Championships. John Lyon, George Psorakis, Alan Postlethwaite and Billy Hulmes were the principal members of the team which won the title by a massive 10 points.

Season 1964/65 opened without the familiar face of Jack Senescall, and David Lamb had ended his course at St. John's College but he had signed to play for West Yorks Road Car Company and York in the Yorkshire League.

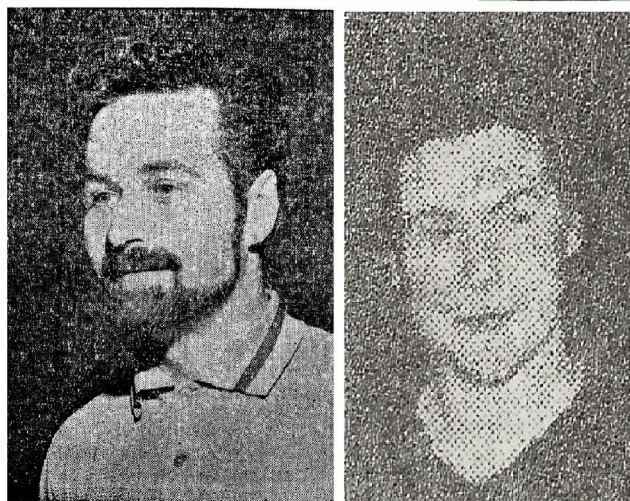
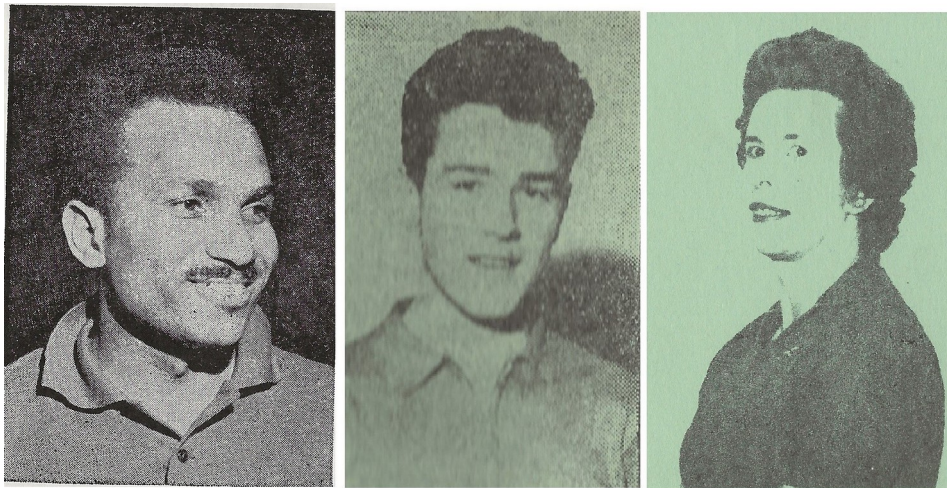
The Bagshaw Trophy was as popular as ever and attracted 110 entries. For the second successive season a high handicap player won the title when George Walls (+21) beat George Psorakis (scratch).

The Men's Singles Championship was again a success for Nitin Shah. He had only played one league match all season but he was still able to beat Gregoire easily in the semi-final and was never extended by John Lyon in the final. He was probably the best player ever seen in York up to that point. If he had been able to play regularly during his two year stay, he would certainly have been a big asset to the Men's 1st team in the Yorkshire League, probably enabling them to maintain their Division 1 status.

An interesting newcomer to York this season was Denis Norburn, who had moved from Halifax, where he had enjoyed a long and successful career with over 60 Yorkshire League appearances and 8 matches for the County Senior 2nd team. He was now obviously past his best but he still produced a 90% average for Combined Hospitals in Division 1. He teamed up with Betty Senescall to win the Mixed Doubles and she won the Ladies Singles for the 5th time.

The Yorkshire League results were again disappointing, The Men's 1st team showing could be described as "middling", and the 2nd team finished pointless after using no less than 10 players in 6 matches. The Youths team fared even worse, losing all 9 matches and winning only 9 sets. The Ladies team did not function this year, which is not really surprising because in the previous season they had touched new depths with only 4 sets won in 8 matches.

Bootham Conservatives easily retained their league title by a margin of 9 points. Some kind of record was set in January when in the Groves WMC v Co-op Division 2 match, Denis Corner umpired all 10 sets (it is assumed he was not playing), Denis is one of those special characters - he was playing in the league for York Boy's Club as far back as 1938, and although he has not played continually since then, he is still playing in the league in 1988 when now a Senior Citizen, and is probably the oldest ever local registered player.



Some of the top York players in the 1960s. Top: Francis Gregoire, John Lyon, Mary Ellis; Middle: John Parrish, Rhona Reed; Bottom: Janet Pears, Helen Standish

Continued popularity for the game saw season 1965/66 start with an additional 14 teams making a total of 94 in 8 divisions. Unfortunately this increase in quantity was negated by a decrease in quality. Three leading players, David Lamb, George Psorakis and Betty Senescall had not registered this year, and the overall strength of Division 1 was probably at its lowest level for many years, as is reflected in the Yorkshire League results. No less than 10 players were chosen for an unsettled Men's 1st team which won only 1 match and was relegated to Division 3. The Men's 2nd team used 11 players with modest success in Division 4, but the Youths team was only marginally better than last season when securing 1 point. The Ladies had re-entered the league but as they were weaker than 2 years ago because of the retirement of Betty Senescall, they were again pointless with only 5 sets won.

At 45 years of age Len Godderidge overcame a non too generous handicap of +7 to win the Bagshaw Trophy against David Atkinson (+23) in a very close final, 33-31 in the third game. In the Closed Championships John Lyon at last got his just reward for many seasons of consistency when he became Men's champion after a fine match against Francis Gregoire. John was staring defeat when trailing 17-19 in the third game but he took the next 4 points to clinch the title.

Bootham Conservatives completed a hat-trick of Division 1 championships. No less than three divisional champions all had 100% records. Groves 'A' won all 20 matches in Division 2, their star player being a very promising teenager from Selby, Stan Richards. Ray Calpin was the leading player for Shepherds 'A' who won all their 22 matches in Division 3, and the same record was achieved in Division 7 by National Provincial Bank 'A' in their first season as a member of the League, and the three players, M Perkins, N Platt and S Hurworth all had averages over 86%.

Season 1966/67 opened with West Yorkshire Road Car Co. having entered 10 teams, which is really the optimum unless a club has more than one home venue - it means that the club has a home match on every mid-week night throughout the season.

Yorkshire League results were better than in the last few years. Both Men's teams had average seasons and the Ladies actually succeeded in winning a match. A new Intermediate (under 20) League had been inaugurated this season. A team was entered, and with Stan Richards, Ken Johnson and Joe Sucheki all returning averages of 75%, 4 out of 6 matches were won. The Junior team (under 17), which now had to include a girl, won 3 matches out of 9.

Stan Richards, who would establish himself in the Mens' 1st team by the end of the season, won the Bagshaw Trophy after beating Stan Smith, both having the same handicap (+5).

In the Closed Championships the Men's Singles final involved the same players as last year but the result was reversed, this win for Frank Gregoire starting him on the road towards his second hat-trick of titles. Betty Senescall took the Ladies Singles crown for the sixth and last time.

Bootham Conservative 'A' were league champions for the 4th successive year, with John Lyon, Bill Hulmes and Alan Postlethwaite being the mainstays throughout this spell. Two players recorded 100% averages - in Division 6 Akker (University) had 62 victories and in Division 7 Morgan (Medusa) had 44 wins.

A further upsurge in popularity saw an additional Division 9 being created for season 1967/68, with a total of 105 teams competing.

A notable new talent to emerge this season was John Parrish (Terrys) who had previous experience in the Pontefract League. He had played in York the previous year when he had a 95% average in Division 3; he was still in Division 3 this season but he proved himself to be a match for any local player. His first impact came in the Bagshaw event when, with a handicap of +4, he won the title after beating Clive Warley (+18). He went on to be successful in the Closed Championships, losing in the Men's Singles Final to Frank Gregoire, but he and Helen Standish won the Mixed Doubles. A most unusual match occurred between Parrish and the author in an early round of the Singles. Both our styles of play were ultra-defensive using ordinary pimpled rubber bats and it was certain that the match would be prolonged, It was therefore timed

from the outset. It was 11 minutes before a point was scored and after 15 minutes I was leading 5-0, at which point the expedite rule was applied. This rule stated that each player would serve alternately, and if a point has not been decided after 25 strokes have been made, then one point is awarded to the non-server. This rule continues for the rest of the match. I hung on to win the first game 21-17, narrowly lost the second 26-24 and went down 21-18 in the decider.

Another never-to-be-forgotten encounter occurred in the final of the team handicap knock-out competition, the Shepherd Trophy, when Terrys met the Telephone Managers Office. Terrys, who included Parrish and another staunch defender, Barry Carpenter, had a very generous 70 points start and the only chance that TMO had was if the author and Barry Thomas could defeat Carpenter and Helen Standish by large margins. Each set consisted of one game of 42-up with the expedite rule not applicable to this competition, and the first set of the night between the author and Carpenter was destined to be a very prolonged affair. The set lasted 1 hour and 35 minutes and resulted in a win for the author 42-18, as good a margin as could be expected. Clive Warley was a spectator and he recorded 6780 strokes in the set, the longest rally being 652 strokes. Terrys were in command for the rest of the match and ran out easy winners.

West Yorkshire Road Car Co. 'A', with Doug Utley and Stan Smith as the back-bone, won the Division 1 title for the first time after finishing on level points with Hospitals 'A' but having a marginally better sets average. There were no less than 3 players with 100% records. J Hare (Electricity) won 59 sets in Division 5, P Hand (Rowntrees) won 35 in Division 9, and pride of place went to J. Morgan (Medusa) who won all his 50 sets in Division 6, this being his second successive 100% season - in fact in his three seasons in the league his record was won 131 lost 2.

The brightest note in the Yorkshire League was the break-through into the senior teams of younger players like Paul Cameron and Joe Sucheki, who also played in the Intermediate team which won 4 matches out of 6.

Season 1968/69 opened with 98 teams, a slight decrease on last year.

Frank Gregoire added the Bagshaw Trophy to his collection of successes when, from a scratch handicap, he beat P Lambert (+25) after an exciting third game which ended at 33-31.

In the Closed Championships Frank completed his second hat-trick of Singles wins when he defeated Paul Cameron. In the ten seasons since coming to York he had now won the title six times, been runner-up twice and in both remaining years he had lost in the semi-final to Nitin Shah - a very consistent record. The new Ladies Champion in an all Terrys final was Helen Standish, who was to dominate this event over the next few years. The runner-up was none other than Janet Pears, who made a very successful return to the league after a 9 year absence, taking Division 9 by storm in winning all her 53 sets. Other players with unbeaten records were R Bateman (Askham Bryan) with 43 wins in Division 8 and Norman Gawthrope (Fulford) with 35 victories in Division 5 to repeat a similar achievement of five years earlier.

The Division 1 champions were Phoenix WMC which was in effect the old Groves WMC which had moved venue. Stan Smith, Stan Richards and Doug Utley were the regular players. There were two teams with 100% records - New Earswick 'A' in Division 4 won all their 20 matches and Rowntrees YC in Division 6 did likewise.

In the Yorkshire League, a new venture saw a Men's 3rd team entered in lieu of a Junior side. None of the Men's teams averaged more than a point a game but the Ladies had a good season with 5 points from 8 matches and the Intermediates did best of all with 8 points from 5 matches.

The supply of new good class talent continued in 1969/70 when 20 year old Nev Graver moved to York from Norfolk - during the next few years he was almost unbeatable in the league.

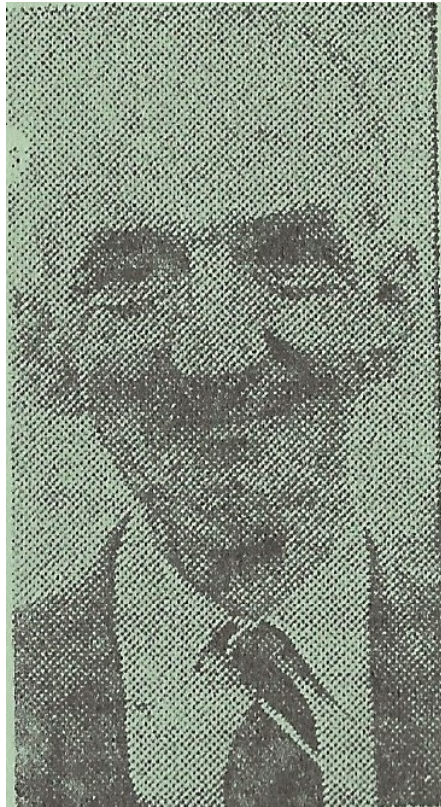
The early part of the season was marred by the death in late October of the Association President, Roland Jakeman, who had held various offices almost continuously for over 40 years.

For the first time in 5 years the Bagshaw Trophy was won by a high handicap player, I Wiley (+22) who knocked out the holder, Gregoire, in the semi-final and then beat Mick Sadler (+9) in the final.

Men at the Helm

"Jake"

"To almost all members of the Association who have not yet reached their mid-thirties the name of Roland Edward Jakeman will mean little more than a name on an uninteresting historical page in the middle of a handbook. Even the majority of older players who knew him would certainly not recognize his Christian names because he was universally known as "Jake".



Roland Jakeman

His link with the Association spanned over 40 years and he was second to no one in his contributions towards the success of the game in York. He was prominent at the formation of the Association in 1927 and became Secretary in 1928 when the initial incumbent, N. Allison, returned to his native Sunderland. He remained in this position for the next few years, and was a member of the Clifton team which won the league in 1931/2.

During the period between the wars he was also prominent in local tennis circles and he always regarded himself as better at the outdoor game. When the league was revived after the war Jake became Treasurer and held that office until 1968 when he was appropriately elected President on the death of R.S. Oloman. In the post-war years he played with St. Olave's, his last season being 1955/6 when well turned 50 years old, and he ended with a very good average of 64% in Division 3.

The Association gave him two special awards - firstly in 1957 and again in 1966 when he received an inscribed clock. He also served the County Association for many years as Hon. Auditor, and this was recognized with an award in 1965.

I can well remember Jake attending many committee and council meetings - a tall lean figure who was totally reliable and dependable and who always believed in doing things in an organized and proper manner. Jake retired in October 1967 after 50 years working for the accountants Forster, Stott in High Petergate.

Unfortunately his retirement was short. He died in October 1969 having enjoyed only one year as President of the Association.

Eric Bell

Albert Eric Bell was the youngest of the original enthusiasts in 1927, being only 17 years old. He was an excellent player and performed the unusual feat of winning the Men's Singles title twice, with a 23 year gap between the two - firstly in 1928 when aged 17 and secondly in 1950 at the age of 40. The reason for this mammoth gap can be partially explained by the fact that after 1928 up to the war, only a handicap singles event was held (which Eric won in 1934) and he did not participate in the league between 1935 and 1947.

Like Jake, Eric initially played for the Y.M.C.A. and then moved to the Clifton Club. He resumed playing in 1947 with Tang Hall and became the Association Secretary for the next 3 seasons, working closely with Jake in re-laying the foundations of the Association.

In 1950 he was elected Chairman, but the anticipated years of continuing service came to a premature sad end in 1952 when he died at the very early age of 42.



Mr. A. E. Bell

Big Loss To York Table Tennis

THE death occurred yesterday of Mr. Albert Eric Bell, of Walney Road, York, in a local hospital. He was 42 and leaves a widow and son.

Eric Bell was well-known in local sporting circles, both before and since the war, but in particular he will be remembered for his connections with table tennis.

When the York Table Tennis League was founded in 1927 he was the first Singles champion at the age of 17, and last won the title in 1950. He represented York on several occasions in Yorkshire Inter-League matches.

GENERAL SECRETARY

From 1947 to 1950 he was general secretary of the York and District T.T.A. and was chiefly responsible for the Association attaining its present position in local sport.

On relinquishing the office of general secretary he was made a vice-president of the Association and maintained his connection with the game through the office of chairman.

A funeral service will be held at Heworth Church on Monday at 1.45 p.m.

Mr. Bell was in local government in York, starting in the Education Department in 1927 before transferring to the City Treasurer's Department in 1936.

Eric Bell's obituary, Yorkshire Evening Press 12th December 1952

Bob Oloman

Robert Stavers Oloman was the Deaf & Dumb Commissioner for York, and his link with the Association certainly dates back to 1931 and possibly before this, because the Deaf Institute was one of the founder clubs in 1927.



Robert Stavers Oloman

His team won the league in 1932/3 with a handicap of +180. He was of average ability and played up to the outbreak of war. During the mid 1930's he was Secretary for a year or so. It is almost certain he did not play after the war - like many of the early pioneers he was comparatively old when his league career started - but he served as chairman for the 1946/7 season.

He re-emerged as chairman on the death of Eric Bell in 1952 and held this office until 1958. He was also elected President in 1954 to succeed the late Bert Keech and he enjoyed this position for 15 years until his own death. He was very active in both roles and all meetings under his control were conducted in a very orderly and fair manner, no matter how contentious the agenda. This skill was reflected in his many public roles - magistrate, councillor, alderman and the ultimate accolade, Lord Mayor in 1959.

During the 1950's and 1960's the Deaf Institute was used extensively by the Association for all meetings and this of course involved a great deal of hospitality on Mr. Oloman's part. His post-war contributions were mainly out of the limelight but they were nevertheless very significant.

Len Godderidge

Len, who started playing in the York league in the early 1950's, was a very good player, probably better than his averages would suggest. He had a tight defence and a text-book back hand attack, which, if I could have emulated, would have extended my horizons considerably.



Len Godderidge

For most of the 1950's Len appeared in Division 2, firstly with Bootham Conservatives and then the County Hospital, which club he was the prime founder. He regularly produced averages of over 80% in Division 2 and in 1958/9 he achieved 71% in Division 1 when not far short of 40 years of age. I often thought that these averages did not do him justice and he sometimes played matches according to the old maxim that the game is more important than the result. For instance, in some of our early encounters Len could have pushed and prodded his way to one or two victories, but this was not his philosophy and the outcome was always an entertaining game but usually a win for myself.

Len's first administrative post was Yorkshire League Secretary for 1957/8 and he subsequently became Match Secretary from 1963 to 1966. His greatest contribution, however, was the excellent production of the Association handbook. During the 1950's the comprehensive 36 page handbook had been produced by various specialist printers but escalating costs in the early 1960's reduced the book to a skeleton of its former self. In 1965 Len decided that something drastic had to be done and he volunteered to be responsible for returning the handbook to its previous high reputation. He immediately produced a 52 page book, mainly stencilled and containing many advertisements and half a dozen photograph reproductions. This was a very fine first effort and furthermore, the cost was virtually defrayed by advertisement income. Thereafter the number of pages increased to 74 and the printing quality gradually improved, and although production costs inevitably rose, by 1973 the 78 page books were costing a mere 6p each.

George and Elaine Lodge

George Lodge and his wife Elaine came to York in 1950 and during their 11 years stay they held continuous

office in positions which entailed a great amount of work.

During the period 1951-60, between them they held the post of Match Secretary which involved the production of fixture lists, preparing for publication and distribution of handbooks, and, throughout the season, control of all league matches. In addition, George was the Competitions Secretary for 6 seasons from 1951, organizing the Bagshaw Competition and Closed Championships. It was my pleasure to participate in the majority of events with George at the helm and I cannot recall any tournaments which were not run to the highest of standards.

As if these duties were not enough George was also the Yorkshire League Secretary for 1951-55, a position which can be very onerous. It involved the selecting and notifying of Men's, Juniors' & Women's teams, organizing venues and refreshments for home matches and transport for away games.

Although George was never quite good enough to represent the Association in the Yorkshire League he always gave a great deal of support, especially to the juniors. Elaine was a regular in the Women's team with a total of 36 Yorkshire League appearances. I can vividly recall one of my early matches for the junior team at the Railway Institute in 1954. 't'l'.le were all inexperienced lads and after a few sets in which we had produced many rash and wild strokes George suggested that we calm down and compose ourselves. I obviously took this advice too literally because for the next 20 years I hardly ever played another attacking shot.

In the positions which they held they obviously came into contact with a great many individual players, and they had the added advantage that apart from being well in command of the requirements of office they were always approachable.

I am sure that they would have continued to serve the Association for many more years, but unfortunately George, who worked for British Rail, was transferred to Darlington in 1960.

Jack Senescall

Jack Senescall and his wife Betty came to York in 1950, both very good players with previous experience in the Huddersfield League.

Jack, who was arguably the best player to compete in the York League up to that point, was not deeply involved in local administration during his early years because he held office at both County and National level. He was the County Secretary from 1953-56, Treasurer from 1952-58, he served on the National Executive Committee for many years up to 1963 and, having qualified as a National Umpire in early 1957, was for some time secretary of the National Umpires' Committee.

He was also a thinker on the game, which is typified in a letter he submitted to the E.T.T.A. magazine in 1958. At that time the service rule in doubles matches allowed the striker-out in each game to decide on the order of service. This meant that if the striker-out in the first game had made an error of judgement, probably because they had never seen the opposition play before, their opponents could, in the second game, leave the order of service unchanged and thereby gain a considerable advantage. Jack thought that this rule was rather unfair and he suggested that the order of play be reversed after each game, basically the same rule which applies today - this was adopted a year or so after Jack's initial suggestion.

He found time to involve himself in local administration when he relinquished his County positions and he served York as Chairman from 1958-62 and again for season 1963/4. He was General Secretary 1960-63 and Yorkshire League Secretary 1963-4. His wife Betty acted as Competitions Secretary for 1957-59.

It was the Association's loss when Jack decided to retire from active participation in 1964.

Personal Memories

I made my competitive baptism for York Boys' Club in the Junior League in October 1952. In those days a top quality racket could be purchased for no more than 10s (50p) and very little deliberation was needed in making a choice. Apart from small variations in the shape of the blade (square or rounded comers) and covering on the handle (plain wood or suede/towelling) all bats were virtually the same. The only practical covering was ordinary pimped rubber with pimples of either 1mm or 1.5mm diameter. Top class balls were 1/2d (6p) each. A top-class Jacques tournament table cost £45 with many other excellent tables at much less prices. League fees were 7/6d (38p) per team, with individual registration fees being 2/6d (13p) for seniors and 1/6d (8p) for juniors.

As for the mode of dress, few men turned out in shorts - at Yorkshire league level and even higher, many preferred wide-bottomed long grey flannels, The number of players wearing regulation shirts was small and it was by no means rare to see a tie discarded, the top button of a working shirt undone, with sometimes a sleeveless pullover still being worn for the duration of the match. Practical footwear was of a limited range with white canvas plimsolls being almost universal, an occasional application of 'Blanco' being required to keep them resembling their original colour. A few enthusiasts invested in track-suits which were always very baggy and available in single colours only (no flashy trimmings or patterns), the range being dark blue, olive green or maroon. They could be purchased for £3.

There were of course a few eccentric dressers and one who springs to mind was George Race of St. Olave's who was a useful player of Division 2 standard. A serious leg war wound had affected his mobility somewhat, and he played many matches in heavy duty shoes and full double-breasted suit with jacket undone, although for difficult matches he would remove his coat and wear suitable footwear. I have seen opponents reduced to tears of laughter by George uttering funny quips and comments while the ball was still in play.

Pushers and prodders like myself were not very popular with the "social" players in the 1950's. In those days the public houses closed at 10.50 p.m. and so any long protracted matches usually caused by ultra-defensive play meant that drinking time was curtailed and sometimes forfeited altogether.

Most playing conditions were reasonable, with Railway Institute probably being as good as any, having the added bonus of changing rooms with showers. A detrimental factor was that the gymnasium attendant would turn the lights out at 9.50 p. m. sharp, but this problem could be overcome by playing some sets simultaneously using both top class tables provided.

There were some venues which were rather cramped for defenders, although I experienced nothing as absurd as the pre-war council house bedroom. Co-op Social Club played in a timber-asbestos hut with a stone floor and very limited back room, which could be very cold in the middle of winter. Bootham Conservative Club presented a different problem. Here again there was limited space with the additional hazard of a roaring coal fire behind one end which could leave a long-ranging defender with scorched legs.

My first club, York Boys' Club, had decent conditions - ample room and good lighting, but the only drawback was that although matches always commenced with a new top class ball, if that became cracked the scarcity of funds dictated that the match would continue using a "Woolworths two-penny" ball.

Matches at West Yorkshire Road Car Co. could be rather trying. The venue was the back portion of the Toft Green Canteen, flimsily separated from the general noise and melee by a portable screen. The level of noise, clattering of crockery, cutlery and fruit machines could be very distracting, and a long discarded cold greasy chip on the hard composition floor could cause a nasty skid if trod upon during a sequence of desperate long-ranging defending.

In the days before universal car ownership there are memories of travelling by Pullman bus from Exhibition Square to R.A.F. Linton, one of the few venues where supper was provided - unfortunately the completion of the match was strictly tied to the time of the last bus home.

I can recall a Yorkshire Junior League match at Doncaster Y.M.C.A. in 1957 which produced a novel surprise. The bounce of the ball on the table sounded somewhat “tinny” but the table played true and fast. Half-way through the evening it was revealed that the table was all metal, the legs being metal cylinders standing on square plates. The table was of course quite legal as it had a regulation bounce but thereafter we were careful not to catch a thigh or racket hand on the corner of the table.