

BOWLS DIPLOMACY



“Where friendship doesn’t get in the way of good competition”

So says the Anzac Championship trophy currently sitting with Hawthorn Bowling Club for the second time. The members at Hawthorn Bowling Club have used the shared love of bowls and a good time to forge a special friendship with the members at Arrowtown Bowling Club in New Zealand’s South Island.

What started as a beverage and bowls stop on a covid bubble holiday by Hawthorn members Ursula Noye and Ben Corbett to the picturesque area in NZ in 2021 has become a lasting sister-club relationship. After a covid false start, Arrowtown formally invited Hawthorn members to their club for a mix of bowling and touring over the Anzac week in 2023. This format has endured, setting the tone for the tours that have since followed.

The trophy match was the **Hawthorn-Arrowtown Championship**, though played mainly for honour, and was inaugurally taken by the home team, Arrowtown. The format was mixed, at Hawthorn’s request, and fours, with team players allowed to interchange freely so all can have a go. The tour also featured an exhibition match between the respective club champions, which was also taken by the home team. The visiting men then joined the Arrowtown men for a local weekend fours tournament in Alexandra, with Arrowtown creating a concurrent Women’s tournament for the visiting women, which has become a permanent annual feature of the Arrowtown bowls calendar. As well as the bowls, members enjoyed organised tourist activities and excursions showing off the best that Central Otago has to offer.

In a formal display of the Anzac spirit, Hawthorn accepted Arrowtown’s invitation to march in the local Anzac parade and lay a wreath at the war memorial. After losing the trophy, but mainly the honour, Hawthorn had no option than to return the favour and host Arrowtown the following year. As opposed to playing in any existing tournaments, Hawthorn developed its own ‘Progressive Tournament’ for the tour, which sees our visitors play three rounds of bowls at three clubs including Hawthorn. The visitors play each of the home teams, which each host a meal, and the ‘Progressive Champions’ crowned on points at the end of the day.

(Continued on next page).



Teams played on the Victorian Parliament House green in April 2026.

HAWTHORN – ARROWTOWN APRIL 2026



With the tradition of the domination of the home team continued, Arrowtown then followed suit when hosting Hawthorn a second time in 2025. And, in 2026, the tradition remains unbroken with Hawthorn triumphing in the Championship once again.

In a slight change, in 2025 Hawthorn invited members from other clubs – Ivanhoe and Heathmont – who had either changed clubs or been a part of the 2024 tour hosted by Hawthorn. This ‘new’ tradition was followed by Arrowtown this year, as members of nearby clubs Queenstown and Mornington were a part of the visiting team.

In its fourth year, this year’s tour saw not only the Championship, but also the Club Champions demonstration match and dinner attended by local federal member the Hon. Dr Monique Ryan, the Progressive Tournament with Ivanhoe Bowling Club hosting the morning round, Alphington Bowling Club hosting the lunchtime round and Hawthorn hosting the final round and festivities. This year Ivanhoe took home the crown, despite Hawthorn’s attempt to sway the balance with the inclusion of World Bowls CEO Neil Dalrymple on their team.

In the same way that Arrowtown treats Hawthorn to the best of its infamous Autumn colours and adventure activities, the bowls were complemented by very Melbourne activities, including a roll and morning tea at Victoria’s Parliament House hosted by local state member Hon. John Pesutto, a day at Flemington’s Anzac Day Races, a sea shantying cruise down the Maribyrnong and some fine dining at The George on Collins.

The friendship and love of organising between Ursula Noye of Hawthorn and Peter Dunne of Arrowtown has grown with the backing of their respective clubs to create a tour that is friendly but competitive, structured but innovative, formal but fun, and guarded closely by returnees and refreshed with newbies, and is a fine example of the sports diplomacy made possible by a shared love of bowls and a good time.

David Schramm, Hawthorn Bowling Club:

“When these opportunities come your way, and you run with it, it is truly remarkable where it can take you. Over the last 5 years, with a lot of hard work from good people, we have been able to establish a reciprocal international Championship, which has already extended beyond the bounds of each of our clubs to become even bigger.”

Peter Dunne, Arrowtown Bowling Club:

“In the truest form of the Anzac spirit, the relationship that has been cemented between our two clubs is based on friendship, hard work and a healthy dose of competition. We share with each other the best of our members, clubs and towns, and have succeeded in creating life-long relationships and growing a friendly and competitive tour. In 2027, we are looking forward to welcoming friends, old and new, and reclaiming the Anzac Championship trophy!”



HAWTHORN - ARROWTOWN APRIL 2026

