

Croquet report for 2016

The year was a notable one for its losses. The deaths in particular of long-standing club and committee members Richard Harris and Malcolm Keith were especially sad. Both men gave a great deal of their time and energy towards the promotion of croquet here on the Island and their inspiration will be seriously missed for many years to come. At the time of his death in June Richard had extensive plans for the croquet year already in place and we were pleased to be able to follow them through to a successful conclusion. By coincidence we were due to host for the first time the CA's All-England GC Handicap final in September with Richard managing. This was his favourite event, having won it twice and runner-up in the year between, and he would have been delighted to discover that two Ryde players reached the final with one just failing to grab the winner's trophy presented by Diana Harris. CA events such as this and the AC Treasurer's Tankard a week earlier are major money-spinners for the club and we owe a big debt of gratitude to the limited number of talented and willing members whose contribution enables us to profit from their success. The country has a good number of larger and more prestigious clubs and future events at Ryde can never be taken for granted.

Clement weather for much of the playing season helped us attract plenty of outside interest throughout the year and although new regular memberships were limited we have an encouraging list of potential recruits lined up for 2017. It is probably too early to say how well our revamped introductory scheme is working and we will need to take into account the effects of an enhanced training programme planned for all members this year. Without a professional coaching environment the sport must rely heavily on everyone's willingness to help newer players in whatever ways they can.

Our brave attempt to run two level-play GC league teams this year, in addition to the doubles and handicap sides, was hindered by the unpredictable nature of life, nevertheless fixtures were completed and several members got a first taste of play at a higher level. The introduction of a new GC handicap scheme went ahead largely without problems and our future intention is to concentrate more fully on this popular form of the game.

Ryde's reputation as a competitive GC club was not all doom and gloom but splendidly demonstrated at the Southern Challenge in July. Entering two teams for the first time in a two-day mainland competition at split venues is not without its difficulties but to achieve 2nd place of ten in Division 1 at Southwick and 3rd place at Surbiton was a remarkable achievement. Three Ryde players, again in Richard's absence, joined the Hampshire County team in August and helped to record a best ever 6th place of 12 in the GC Inter-Counties at Southwick.

Richard's loss as a key player and organiser will probably be felt most strongly though within the AC team. Although outplayed in the Secretary's shield national competition our remaining six playing members managed another very competitive season in the SCF league and along with national encouragement we hope to persuade more of our members to at least find out what they are missing.

Ryde's home tournament season went ahead on the now regular slots in May, June and July although the GC in May was not run as a CA event and the GC in July was part of the CA's A-Level series for the first time. Imminent changes to the CA membership structure will mean that we continue to tinker with the status of these various events in order to ensure a maximum

numbers of entries. Ryde players featured heavily in the winning positions in May and for the fourth year running, despite some determined opposition, the GC Open Centenary Cup remains on home soil.

Our friendly fixture list continues to grow with a new combined AC/GC visit this year from The All England Club, that's right, Wimbledon, one of the original Croquet clubs. These events with less formality are always popular and give us a chance to provide external competitive experience for players who have yet to reach league standard.

Corporate entertaining also remains popular amongst our growing list of clients and we found room for another half dozen or so visits this year. Most such players do not follow through with membership but financial rewards are significant and promotion of both croquet and RLTC is tangible but difficult to quantify. Changes within the croquet committee and the need to make best use of limited resources will mean some adjustment to the scheme in future but with the continued goodwill of our members there is no reason why this element of club life should not continue.