

## **Croquet Report for 2019**

The Club, and croquet section in particular, were dealt a heavy blow at the end of November by the unexpected loss of our good friend and long-time member John Sim following a short illness. Tributes to John have been paid elsewhere and it will only be with the passage of time that the true value of John's passion and dedication to the Club he loved becomes fully appreciated and deeply missed.

2019 was another season in which the traditional April start was delayed by wet weather, fortunately relenting in time for Improvers' week. Those who ventured early from hibernation were able to use the normal mix-in sessions for supervised tuition and practice of important croquet skills. Introduction of a revised edition of the Rules of Croquet this year required explanation of several significant changes particularly relevant to match play and two seminars were organised.

Resulting from our usual Introduction to Croquet course and a new initiative via the Price is Wight we welcomed thirty new members by the end of June. Reliance on all of our experienced players was essential to provide basic small group coaching. An unexpected opportunity arose in July for some professional coaching in situ by a long-standing Ryde supporter, Cliff Jones; many of our players made good use of this. In order to ease pressure on the very popular mix-in sessions we introduced a morning session for more established players and additionally a specific opportunity for team practice.

We now have four regular Croquet Association tournaments in place, Golf Croquet A, B and C-levels, catering for the full handicap range, as well as the long-established Association Croquet handicap and advanced events. Entry numbers continue to rise in all categories with one event oversubscribed within several weeks of the CA online system going live. Ryde players participated in all of these competitions with particular success in the C-level.

Our invitation this year to host the CA Musk's Cup GC Tournament had to be reluctantly declined as it was scheduled to clash with the Island scooter rally, and advance accommodation was impossible to obtain. This year's GC World Championships at Southwick gave several members a rare opportunity to watch (in the flesh and online) the supreme exponents of our sport in action in this country.

One of our rapid improvers qualified for the GC All England Final near Bath, keeping up a growing tradition of success in this national competition. Ryde entered teams again this year for the SCF Solstice at Hamptworth and SECF Southern Challenge at Southwick, all highly placed but missing out on the silverware.

AC and GC SCF leagues again provided valuable opportunities for an increasing number of members to gain match experience against overseas opposition. In addition we have introduced several initiatives to provide higher handicap and less confident players with in-house games under match regulations. Our traditional end of season Thornton trophy doubles event is constructed to give such players every chance to reach the winner's rostrum.

Twelve corporate events ran very successfully as an afternoon tea format with the help of many volunteers to organise and give guidance on the lawns. As a direct result of one of these afternoons we were approached by two Brighstone residents for advice regarding starting a local croquet club. Through the CA we have been able to provide them with playing equipment and introductory documentation and have offered to assist further as their project proceeds.

Winter croquet was curtailed from the beginning of October by the diluvian conditions making all lawns unplayable. Nevertheless, several winter get togethers in the clubhouse enabled members to meet up for refreshments and social entertainment.

The irrigation system settings were adjusted by our “resident experts” at the beginning of the season to enable us to achieve greater efficiency with the same volume of water; green lawns throughout an unusually dry summer being evidence of the benefit of this exercise. End of season maintenance work on the sprinkler heads also led to an innovative method for simplifying the labour involved which we would hope to implement fully in future years.

We continued to rely heavily on the dedication and flexibility of our groundsman Steve Simmonds who, with John’s guidance, provided the top quality lawns for which Ryde is renowned, and we are pleased to take this opportunity to express our gratitude.

February 2020