

## **Croquet Report for 2021 AGM**

At the start of 2020 the Croquet section had many plans. Winter social events were in progress, five teams were entered in the SCF leagues, a two-day visit from a mainland coach was to be incorporated in Improvers' Week and dates for our usual range of tournaments had been published.

A very wet autumn in 2019 meant that the soil top dressing had not been applied to the lawns when scheduled. Ongoing rain prevented this work being carried out until April 2020.

Following the very wet winter, we had a drought from the middle of April with warm dry weather. These unexpected conditions meant that the grass seed did not germinate well as we initially failed to water sufficiently.

During the time when the club was completely closed the sprinkler heads were checked and realigned, with one requiring complete replacement. More work is needed to make these adjustments simpler in the long term but this will involve a lot of work installing specially designed boxes around each unit. At the same time we were able to devise a more efficient watering regime.

The lawns continued to fare badly with poor grass growth over large areas and considerable bird damage. This was thought to be due to the heavy infestation of leatherjacket larvae which are tasty snacks for many birds. In addition, the long-term dry patch problem was significantly worse, despite application of wetting agents on a regular basis.

It was decided to implement the autumn work in mid-September to provide optimum germination conditions. Because of financial restrictions extra grass seed was applied but no top dressing this year. The lawns were then closed for two weeks to aid lawn recovery.

From March the country had been in the grip of Covid and all our future plans were thrown into disarray. The club was completely closed until early May when pre-booked singles play was permitted. Matches and tournaments were cancelled one by one and a lawn booking system was quickly and successfully implemented. At the request of a number of croquet players, a fixed rota was set up utilising two 2-hour sessions a day, seven days a week, so that members had regular games and opponents arranged for them.

Because of concerns about the possible transmission of Covid, mallets were provided on permanent loan as required and hoops and balls were disinfected and put out daily. In June restrictions were reduced allowing limited doubles play and in July the decision was made to leave the hoops in place as the gates were locked overnight and with seven day a week all day play, the frequent removal and replacing of hoops caused the hoop holes to enlarge. Each week after mowing the lawns were reset to minimise wear.

During the summer, with more relaxed Covid restrictions, singles and doubles internal competitions and leagues were organised and were well supported. In August the usual small team travelled to Southwick as part of the Hampshire county entry for a modified Inter-Counties tournament. Despite the lack of regular mainland competition, we are confident that many members played more croquet than they would have done under normal circumstances, albeit without traditional mix-ins.

A group in Brighstone had been interested in starting a village croquet club. The CA had loaned mallets, hoops and balls and we had attended several meetings to give advice on siting the lawn and managing sessions, but Covid concerns meant that the project had to be dropped.

In early July after work from a number of club members, the Croquet Summerhouse was refurbished and dedicated to the memory of John Sim. A gesture much appreciated by his family. Donations were invited for a memorial bench which it is planned to install in the spring of 2021.

Our end of season Thornton Trophy Tournament was delayed by very wet weather until the third weekend in October. This was a doubles competition run over two days to comply with Covid regulations. A record thirty-two people took part and the winning pair were new member Mick Abbott and Jim O'Keeffe. The trophy was presented by Robin Thornton's widow Shirley, Robin having died in July.

For winter play four smaller lawns were set out along the northern boundary. This was an attempt to take advantage of the slightly better drainage in this area and provide more winter play. However, with ongoing wet weather in the autumn and further Covid lockdowns, very little play has actually been possible.

The Southern Croquet Federation virtual AGM was held by Zoom enabling people to attend if they wished.

The Management Committee has implemented a new scheme for Grounds maintenance with the sub-committees for each sport taking more responsibility for their specific requirements.

As we go into 2021 we plan ahead with a full programme in the hope that Covid vaccination in particular will enable a closer return to normality.

1<sup>st</sup> February 2021