

Croquet in Busselton 1898 – 2000

Margaret Dawson

Because of the lack of early records of the Busselton Croquet Club, newspaper articles from the National Library of Australia *Trove* website have been used and these give an insight into the game and early years of the Busselton Club which was one of the first in Western Australia.

Before the Busselton Croquet Club was formed, croquet was played at the homes of interested people or at community events.

The first recorded reference that I could find of croquet being played in Busselton was in an article in the ***Bunbury Herald Thursday 6 January 1898***, which stated

‘The annual sport’s [Day] was held in the *Cattle Chosen* paddock yesterday and were largely attended both by young and old. From early morning carriages were busily employed in driving out those bound for the grounds and throughout the day these vehicles were busily employed running to and fro from the town. Viands of all kinds were amply provided, families sending in baskets to the common stock, and as a result there was not only plenty provided, but there were a variety of delicacies to suit all palates. It was rather early in the year for fruits, but mulberries and figs were in abundance.

The various sports and pastimes incidental to a picnic were indulged in throughout the day, plenty of swings and round games and croquet while a number of races were run during the afternoon for money prizes.’

The ***South-Western News Friday 8 September 1905*** reports the croquet lawn was to be laid down:

Croquet Lawn

‘The Works Committee were empowered to proceed with the laying down of 40 feet X 30 feet croquet lawn on the recreation ground, the cost of same not to exceed £15.’

The ***South-Western News 9 February 1906*** reported from the Busselton Meeting of the Municipal Council held in the Council Chambers –

Correspondence:

‘Mr AJ Fisher secretary of the Vasse Tennis Club, asking that a croquet club which is being formed in connection with the Vasse Tennis Club be given first consideration when the Council when allotting days for the use of the croquet lawn. The Council decided to allow the Vasse and Busselton Tennis clubs to have prior right on the croquet lawn on the days for which they have the use of the tennis courts. The lawn is to be granted the clubs free of charge for the remainder of the present season.’

Mention has been made that Sir Stewart Bovell remembers playing croquet with his mother in Busselton in 1904 but that can’t be correct as Sir Stewart wasn’t born until December 1906. This date is prior to any documented evidence of a club being in existence at that time. Sir Stewart may have been referring to croquet played at a private residence or on grounds elsewhere

South-Western News Friday 8 November 1907

Busselton Croquet Club

‘The annual meeting of the Busselton Croquet Club was held at the Municipal Chambers on Wednesday 39th ult. There was a fair attendance. The Rev. RE Chapman occupied the chair. The balance sheet for the past season was submitted, and showed a credit balance of

£2.16s, which was considered entirely satisfactory. Office bearers for the ensuing season were elected:

Patroness, Mrs Frank Wilson; President, the Mayoress (Mrs George Barnard); Vice Presidents, Mesdames Russell and Lodge and Messrs F Cammilleri, GB Milne and JS Bignell ; Treasure, Mr R Wood; Secretary Mr R Wood; Committee Mesdames Barker and Macintyre and Misses Tonkin, Conning and H Smith.

It was resolved that the annual subscription be 5s with no reduction for families. Visitors to be admitted as members and have full privileges on payment of 2s.6d. It was agreed to open the season with a progressive tournament as soon as the ground was passed by the Council. The matter of joining the Croquet Association was left in the hands of the committee.

A rule to the effect than no member of the club shall be permitted to play two games in succession while other members are waiting to play was agreed.'

Newspaper report re the Opening of the Busselton Croquet Club:

South-Western News Friday 4 December 1908

'The opening of the Busselton Croquet Club has been fixed for Wednesday afternoon next, at 3 pm. The ceremony will be performed by the Mayor and at 3.30, progressive croquet will be played for a trophy presented by Mrs T Prosser. The club extend a cordial invitation to all, and a very pleasant afternoon is looked forward to.

Entries for a ladies handicap singles tournament for a trophy presented by Mr Eustace Cohen will be received by the secretary (Mr R Wood) up to Monday the 14th ins. The entrance fee has been fixed at 6d and play will commence on Wednesday, the 16th inst.'

Southern Times (Bunbury, WA: 1888-1916), Tuesday 21 January 1908

Croquet

'The progressive croquet tournament organised by St Mary's Ladies Guild, and held on the Esplanade lawn, proved a most enjoyable function. The attendance was very good and included a fair sprinkling of visitors. Prizes donated by Mrs M A Bignell, of Melbourne, were competed for, and interesting contests resulted in Mr A Montgomery and Mr J S Bignell securing first and second prizes respectively. The prizes took the form of a double bezique set, and a silver-mounted biscuit barrel. The arrangements were in the capable hands of Mrs Lodge, as secretary.'

South-Western News Friday 12 November 1909

'Croquet players connected with both clubs formed last season met at the Weld Institution on Monday evening, and accepted a scheme presented by sub-committee of their amalgamation. Mr H H Russell was elected to the chair, and it was unanimously decided to bring into existence a new club, to be called the Sussex Croquet Club. The following were

then elected office bearers for the season: - Patron, Mrs F Wilson; president, the Mayoress of Busselton, [Mrs Barnard]; vice presidents, Mesdames J S Bignell and T S Lodge, and Messrs F Cammilleri and E G Cohen; committee, Mesdames Prosser and Knapton, Miss Tonkin, and Messrs. JS Bignell and CB Andrews.

The opening of the season took place on Wednesday, when in conjunction with the bowling club, a number of players and their friends were entertained at afternoon tea.

Mr R O Law, president of the WA Croquet Association, who was in Busselton early this week, has donated a trophy for competitions of the new club.'



Busselton Croquet Club 1909 [Busselton Historical Society]

The South-Western News Friday 14 January 1910

Busselton Municipal Council meeting correspondence:

'From Sussex Croquet club advising that the Busselton and Vasse Clubs have amalgamated under the above name, and asking for use of green on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays, for which the fee of £5.5s was enclosed. It was decided on the motion of Crs Macintyre and Stone, to grant the request so long as only one club required the use of the green.'



Croquet players in Busselton, ca. 1910. At far left George W. Barnard, seated 3rd from left Mrs Eliza Jane Barnard [Busselton Historical Society]

During the next few years until World War I there are various articles mentioning the activities of the Busselton Croquet Club, usually associated with the Busselton Bowling Club, and both clubs combined to hold tournaments. The activities of the Clubs appears to have ceased during World War I and the article below mentions a meeting to resurrect the Croquet Club:

***South-Western News* dated Friday 7 November 1919**

‘The annual meeting of the Busselton Croquet Club was held on Friday evening at Mrs JS Bignell’s residence. Mr GW Barnard presided over a fair attendance. The club having gone into recess in 1916 for the period of the war, it was considered that the time was now opportune to resuscitate the game here, and it was resolved to elect office bearers for the forthcoming season and make arrangements to have the lawn put in order. The financial position disclosed a credit of a few shillings.’

The office bearers appointed were: President, Mrs HC Prinsep; vice presidents: Mesdames JS Bignell, T Prosser, GW Barnard, and JG Dodds; committee Mesdames Andrews, Lodge, Barnard, Bovell and Prosser; Hon Secretary, Mrs CB Andrews; lawn steward, Mr GW Barnard. Members fee for the season was fixed at 7s 6d, and visitors using the green over fourteen days 2s 6d per month. It was decided to extend a cordial invitation to all interested in the game to joining the club, and thus assist in the making of the season a successful one.’

Early newspaper articles mention of players from the Moorabinda Croquet Club in Bunbury and Busselton Croquet Club playing in their annual carnivals. The first mention of pennant matches found between these clubs was in 1924.

Sunday Times (Perth, WA : 1902 - 1954), Sunday 17 February 1924

CROQUET

‘The croquet season has recommenced after the interval set aside for club matches, and all lovers of the game will find a busy time ahead.’

The fixtures include the Bunbury carnival week, commencing on February 18, the Busselton carnival on March 3, and the pennant season on March 19.

There are seven fine lawns at Bunbury, and the Bunbury players have arranged an attractive programme, comprising the South-West champion singles and doubles, as well as handicap events, an electric light carnival, the play-off for the handsome shield for country clubs, champion fours etc. The greatest enthusiasm has been shown by the seven country clubs that entered teams to play the qualifying games.

In the pennants thirteen A teams and nine B teams have been entered. Play this year will be in sections, Easter and Western, to avoid the loss of time and the strain on players taking part.'

Special General Meeting November 23rd 1929

Business – To receive secretary's report re pennants

At a meeting held November 17th at Donnybrook delegates were chosen from Bridgetown, Collie and Busselton.

It was decided to form a South West League to play pennant matches. Balingup was not represented but has decided to join.'

Information from Club Minute Books

The oldest **Minute book that the Busselton Croquet Club has covers the period from 21st October 1929 until Feb 10th 1962**. During this period the Club appears to have many members and very active.

Minutes from the 1929 Annual General Meeting held on 21st October 1929 - most of those present and office bearers appear to be women.

Members [present]

Mesdames – Barnard, Andrews, Stone, Prosser, Fildes, Winter, Bovell, A Moore, Coates, B Moore, Reid Anderson. Mr Neville

Election of Officers

Patron	Mrs Neville
President	Mr Neville
Vice Presidents	Mrs Barnard
	Mrs Killerby
	Mrs DM Stone
	Mrs Dods
	Mrs Mann
	Mrs Ker

Committee

Mesdames	Bovell, Anderson, Stone, Fildes, A Moore, Reid, Barnard,
Secretary	Mrs Andrews
Ass Secretary	Mrs J Stone

Handicappers Andrews, Bovell & McDaniel
Green Steward Mr Barnard
Assistant Green Steward Mr Neville

In 1929 the Western Australia Centenary year, the Club held a Centenary carnival



Busselton Croquet Club 1929 WA Centenary [Busselton Historical Society]

As mentioned above the Croquet Club combined with the Busselton Bowling Club to hold annual carnivals. In a newspaper article dated 1929 the Bowling Club president, Mr Bignell said that their annual carnivals had been going for 24 years. Although the Croquet Club was not officially formed in 1905, it appears that from the early years after formation they were involved in these carnivals.

Special trains ran from Perth to Busselton for the Annual Bowling and Croquet Carnivals and were very popular.

Sunday Times (Perth, WA: 1902 -1954), Sunday 9 March 1925

THE BUSSELTON CARNIVAL

A special train, conveying 126 bowlers and croquet players, will leave Perth station at 7.35am to-morrow (Monday). It is anticipated that from the point of view of the number of competitors the carnival will eclipse all previous ones held at Busselton. All the accommodation offering has been fully engaged, and a pleasurable week is looked forward to by those who are making the journey. The acting delegate will be at the Perth railway station at 7 o'clock to hand out tickets.

Daily News (Perth, WA: 1882 – 1950) Monday 6 March 1933



A special train left Perth today conveying competitors in the Annual Bowling Club and Croquet Carnival. The picture shows Messrs A McGhee, GM Young, Capt Parks and Mr JA Naylor leaving in the train. The Croquet players are Mrs AH Pether, Mrs T Dickson and Miss O Caesar.

The following excerpt is from a comprehensive article relating to the Annual Carnival – Interesting to see the large number of players in attendance.

**The South Western News (Busselton, WA: 1903 – 1949) Friday 24 February 1939
THE BUSSELTON CROQUET CARNIVAL.**

INCREASE NUMBER OF ENTRIES

'The Annual Croquet Carnival conducted by the Busselton Croquet Club in conjunction with the annual bowling carnival, proved most successful, everything passing off without the slightest hitch. An increased entry on last year's total of 80 to 105 must have been gratifying to the members of the club, whilst a large contingent of about thirty players from Bunbury visited the green on the Wednesday and augmented the total.'

During World War II the Annual Carnivals weren't held and there is mention of this in a newspaper article (**South Western News**) **Thurs 25 Feb 1943**

'On Sunday last the president (Mrs PS Bignell), and members of the Busselton Croquet Club entertained visiting bowlers, croquet players and friend, to a farewell afternoon tea to mark the successful conclusion of the bowling carnival.

The president in welcoming the visitors, regretted the war conditions had prevented the club from holding a croquet carnival this year and hoped that an Allied victory would soon permit a return to normal conditions.' Although the club had not conducted a carnival, handicap singles were held for the entertainment of visiting ladies.'

Information taken from Minute Book dated from May 1962 until 28th June 1984

From the minutes the Club during this period was facing the same issues that the Club has today – maintenance and watering of the greens, water problems, fees, fundraising, fees, busy bees and carnivals.

Women played croquet on Wednesdays, and Saturdays were for men and women. Most of the office holders were women with the men assisting with the maintenance and manual work.

In 1962 there were 26 financial members – 22 playing and 4 social members. At the meeting held on 3rd November 1962 they discussed players attending Country Week in Perth. The fees subs for the year were £1.1.0 and social members 5/-.

In General Business on August 25th 1963 it was reported that,

'Mr Banks [shire engineer] has decided to remove trees at the end of No 2 green and make the full size lawn from that end'.

The content of the minutes of an informal meeting held on **August 25 1963** show a very similar to proposal to that proposed for the Club in recent years.

'An informal meeting was called on August 25 1963 for Mr L Weston to meet ladies of the Croquet Club.

Nine members were present – Mesdames Jones, Perry, Wallingford, McDaniel, Javens, Edwards, Summers, Slee

Mr Weston of Shire Council, and President of Sports Committee, put an offer to the ladies on Croquet greens on the sea front. Three or four greens with a new club house to be ready by Dec 1964. Ladies were asked to discuss the proposition at a Sept 4th meeting with some idea of a new club house. Mr Weston informed that the Busselton Bowling Club were prepared to build the club house and take over our greens if we took the new ones. Nothing at present is down in writing. Mr Weston to see the Bowling Club officials for further information.'

At the meeting held on Sept 4th 1963 Mr Weston again attended and the above matter was discussed after he left. A plan of the building for the club house submitted and the cost to be £9,000 with the Bowling Club willing to pay £800. As everyone was not agreeable a vote was taken from all present excepting two social members. All votes were put into sealed envelopes, to be kept till further votes could be attained from members not present.

Two other special meetings were held on June 15th and 24th re the transferring of the club to the sea front. Several of the ladies were taken to the proposed site. At the second meeting the secretary

read a list of terms drawn up for the presentation to the Shire Council. They were discussed by members and found favorable. A copy was sent to the Shire Council secretary.

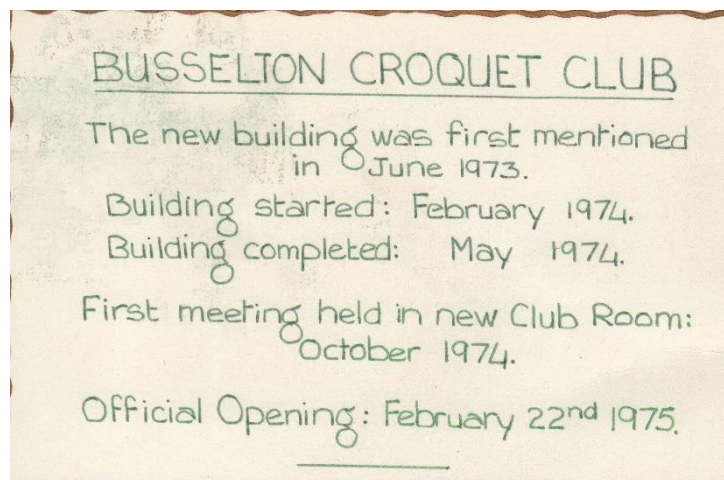
No further mention of this matter in later minutes so obviously this move didn't occur.

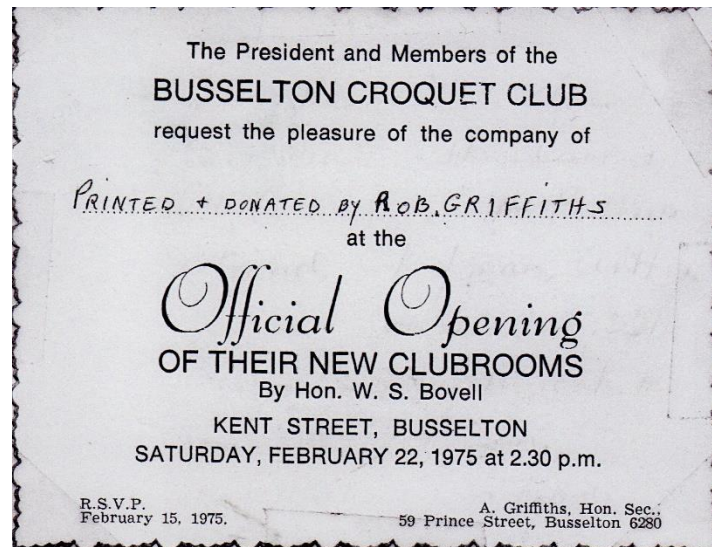
At an extraordinary meeting dated April 29 1970 a proposed merger with the Bowling Club was discussed – suggested by the Bowling Club. Ladies were asked if they wished to amalgamate. It was voted unanimously 'that this was not desired and on a show of hands it was agreed to strongly oppose the move'.

The building of a new club house that opened on the 22nd February 1975 was a major task and this required an enormous effort by the members to bring this to fruition. The first mention of the new club house was in the minutes dated 13 June 1973. To quote : 'A bombshell was dropped in our midst when Mrs Pearson (President) spoke up and announced that her husband would give the Croquet Club \$2 000 providing the ladies raised \$1 000.

The secretary was instructed to write to as many organisations as possible asking for donations. The secretary of the time was Mrs A Griffiths and she worked tirelessly as reflected in the correspondence for that period, with letters sent to individuals, clubs and organisations requesting donations. A \$1 000 grant was received from the Federal Government.

At the Annual General Meeting held on Nov 11 1973 the building fund balance was \$3 188. Alan Rooke the building contractor, his quote to build the club house was \$4 600.





This following article is a write up on the Official Opening of the Club House.

BUSSELTON CROQUET CLUB

Culmination of a Mighty Effort

On Saturday, February 22nd 1975, the members of the Busseton Croquet Club peered anxiously at the clouded skies. Would *Trixie* spoil their carefully prepared activities? It was to be the opening of their new club house – brick built, totally paid for, and tastefully furnished.

Just after Midday many members were feverishly putting the finishing touches to their arrangements. Shady trees were to provide shelter from the hot sun for both members and their expected visitors.

Among the VIP's were Mr Stewart Bovell and the local member for the district, Mr Barry Blaikie and his wife, also representatives of various croquet clubs from as far away as Perth.

The proceedings were opened by the local President, Mrs Lal Summers, who welcomed all comers and graciously thanked all who had in any way, large or small, contributed to the ambition of a small but enthusiastic club – the erection of a fine club room.

She called upon Mr Bovell who traced the beginnings of the club room from 1904, remembering as he did so the names of many of the stalwart foundation members and other early persons. He showed us, with pride, the mallet with which his mother had played some 70 years ago. Having heartily congratulated the committee and club members, he declared the new club rooms open.

Mr Blaikie responded to Mr Bovell while Mr Pearson made a presentation of a bottle of champagne to Mr Bovell on behalf of the locals. Mrs Perry, the longest playing member, also praised all and sundry for their work done in bringing this project to fruition.

One of the esteemed visitors, Mrs Nicholls, made a presentation of a fine silver tray to the Busseton Croquet Club in honour of the occasion.

Mrs Slee rose to present gifts to the President, Mrs Summers and to 'Griff' Griffiths, the Secretary/Treasurer for their untiring efforts of enthusiasm, organisation and fund raising, all of which had done so much to bring this project to such a satisfying conclusion.

Among those present were representatives from Nedlands, Mrs Brede, Association President Mrs Maskew, members of both the Central Croquet and Moorabinda Clubs of Bunbury. We were happy too to see Mrs Burrows.

In the official party were our patroness Mrs MacIntyre and Mr Anderson of Collie who, at the advanced age of 93, drove his own car himself to attend the function. Foundation member Miss Jarvis was also present.

Mrs Maskew from Perth won the raffle of a coffee table and was so delighted with her good fortune that she made a \$10 donation to the club. This was gratefully received.

After the official functions a delicious afternoon tea was served and thoroughly enjoyed by all. The delightful and informal chit chat among all and sundry concluded a most happy and momentous occasion.



Opening of new Club House 1974 Barry Blaike MLA Member for Vasse, Sir Stewart Bovell, ? standing, H Arthur, B Anderson (Collie), Jess Kolhagen, ?



Members at the club house opening



Mrs Griffiths, Bette Javens, Mr Anderson (Collie), Mrs H Arthur, Lal Summers

Information from Minute Book dated from 27th June 1984 until 2nd October 1998

The Club members during this period were regularly playing pennants against other clubs and some members travelled to Perth to play in Country Week Carnivals with some success. April 4th 1992 minutes mention that five members attended – Joan Hebb, Jo Bartlett, Verna Maschette, Lucy Cullam and Royna Muir. Joan Hebb was runner-up in the doubles [no mention of her partner's name].

1992 was the first mention of building the shelter between the courts and then in 1994 the side court shelters.

On the 31st of August 1992 the Busselton Croquet Club became incorporated.

Relocation of the Club was discussed at 17th February 1993 meeting. Croquet Club executives had met with Bowling Club sub- committee executives to discuss the relocation of Croquet Club to a suitable location with an extra court and larger club house. The members discussed this and voted to stay at their present location and were not interested in enlarging it

Again at the September 1993 meeting of the Club relocation was again discussed;

‘President Joan Hebb reported on a meeting with Council officer, Craig Ashley and Brian Woods re the proposed resiting of the Busselton Croquet Club. A tour of inspection visited possible sites at Barnard Park, Lou Weston Oval and Signal Park. Detailed plans of court sites and building placements will be prepared by Messrs Ashley and Wood at a location at Barnard Park and also will be asked for one at Signal Park.’

October 1993 meeting.

‘Mr Coulson from the Local Council brought a map of a location site. He also stated that the Council had no funds to help us, that the Bowling Club were the ones that wanted the Croquet Club to move therefore they should find the funds to re-locate to our satisfaction.

It was moved that in the event of the Croquet Club being re-located, that an independent advisor be appointed and that this person would have the knowledge and also the interest of the Club [Croquet].’

November 1993 meeting

There was further discussion on re-locating the Club, a vote was taken and all were in favour of remaining on present site and the secretary to write to the Shire Council advising of this and asking them for a guarantee that this would not occur now or in the future. A formal application to be written asking for a parcel of land for a 3rd court, and extensions to the club house be considered.

April 20th 1994 meeting further discussion on re-location:

‘President and secretary attended a meeting at council on Thursday 7th April to discuss with Mr Bettink and Mr Valentine. We were shown the site in Barnard Park at the end of Brown St. A letter from the Bowling Club was read out to us at this meeting which seemed most

inadequate as Bowling Club has proposed the Club house the same size, two courts and one shelter shed which they say will only cost \$45,000.

All members were in favour of writing a letter to Mr Bettink stating our needs which is:

- Club House with kitchen at least 50 feet by 30 feet
- Male and female toilets
- 1 machinery shed
- 3 shelter sheds
- 3 courts which would be ready to play on the day we moved
- High security fence with wind break around perimeter
- Fully reticulated

The first mention of **Golf Croquet** in the minutes is on 5th June 1996 – ‘Trial period of golf croquet to commence Wednesday morning 12th June 1996.’



Back Row: Shirley Kilpatrick, Royna Muir, Lucy Cullam

Front Row: Peg Baejov, Jo Bartlett, Verna Maschette



Busy bee preparing for Carnival

Mention is made of many Club stalwarts over the years but one member who made a great contribution to the Busselton Croquet Club is Joan Bartlett who is mentioned in the following article:

Busselton Times article on Joan Bartlett 22 Nov 2000 *Reflections*

by Margot Maurice [Abridged version]

Busselton Octogenarian, Ethel Joan Bartlett, known affectionately to all who know her as 'Jo' is one of the fittest, healthiest women one could meet. Born in Kelmscott during World War I, Jo Bartlett remembers her mother always being an active person. When Jo was about five years of age she remembers her mother being a keen croquet player, a sport at which she continued right through her life.

She originally played at Armadale club but when she moved to Busselton she joined the Busselton Croquet Club where she was an active player up to the age of 92. Is it any wonder croquet was the sport in which Jo became interested more than 24 years ago and with which she has continued to this day as a member of the Busselton Croquet Club. She is a regular player and a coach, something she started simply because 'we had no one here.'

Croquet in Busselton is a well established sport with beginnings going back as far as 1904 [1906]. The late Sir Stuart [Stewart] Bovell's mother was a foundation member and player. Sir Stuart [Stewart] proudly retained the mallet with which his mother played for 70 years, Jo told me. "It is a sport one can play until the senior years providing one is mentally and physically active." Jo said. "It offers many challenges."

When Jo undertook training to become a coach eleven years ago, "The trainees came from all sports. There were footballers and cricketers, not just croquet players. Part of the training sessions had us all kicking a football around and trying out at cricket. We certainly had variety but we were there to learn the principles of coaching not just for one sport." Jo reflected. One of the main reasons for taking this on, was "everyone at croquet was telling everyone else what to do. So it was obvious someone had to be able to give instructions."

Croquet is certainly in the family as Jo's sister Verna is also a member of Busselton Croquet Club. Both sisters are members of the club's Pennants team. "It really is important for keen players to go away to carnivals and visit other clubs if they want to improve their game." Jo told me.

In 1974, the Busselton Croquet Club opened their new club house, totally paid for and tastefully furnished. It was quite a gala day with a guest list that included the local member Mr Barry Blaikie and his wife, Sir Stuart [Stewart] Bovell and representatives of various croquet clubs both country and metropolitan. Proving once again that croquet is a sport able to be continued to senior year, one of the visitors on that occasion was one of the club's foundation members, Mr Anderson of Collie who at the advanced age of 93 had driven his own car to attend the function.

Before the new "flash" clubhouse, Busselton Croquet Club, Busselton Croquet Club was housed in a little shed near the bowling club. Fund raising efforts by keen club members finally brought to fruition this long planned new club house, built on land owned by the Shire but fully paid for by a fine group of volunteer fund raisers.

The same spirit still exists in the Busselton Club as each year they conduct an annual five day carnival which attracts players from all over the State including the number one player in the world, Helene Thurston. These days the Club has 17 active members the oldest of which is 86. There are still two coaches including Jo. With keen players such as Jo Bartlett it's not surprising the club is active.

Jo hasn't had it easy all her life by any means. Her first husband who was a prisoner of war in Singapore died leaving her a widow with very small children. Jo later met and then married her second husband a carpenter and builder from Bunbury. He kept busy with her croquet and her husband with his music interest.

Jo says she will play croquet until she can't walk around. She conserves her energy and relieves the strain of walking these days on occasions with her 'gopher' but certainly but certainly puts her conserved energy into good use on the croquet green.

To see her wily tactics in her game, quickly confirms that croquet is certainly not a game for the mentally inactive. Jo may very easily surpass her mother's record, who played until she was 92, and swing a croquet mallet for many a year to come.