

## Busselton Croquet Club – A Partial History

Busselton Croquet Club began in 1906. It seems that games were played on the Esplanade, which suggests the surface was probably less than ideal. Most players were female and fashion, as well as Victorian morality, insisted that clothing should be completely impractical. The modern technique of swinging the mallet between the legs was impossible, so balls were hit using a mallet with a long handle and a swing more akin to golf, or a more-or-less perpendicular swing at the side. Difficult.

On the other hand, croquet offered opportunities for women to socialise with men in a less controlled environment. (See section History of Croquet).

In 1907 the club was sufficiently established to run a “Handicap Pairs” competition as part of the five-day Busselton Carnival Jan 29 – Feb 2 – two shillings to enter and “Trophies -10s.6d. each. In 1905 this would buy you a day’s work from a skilled tradesman. (*National Archives Currency Converter*)

WA and Busselton were booming on the wealth generated from the goldfields and the club continued to prosper.

WW1 put a stop to that. Fighting to the “last man and the last shilling” had a devastating impact on Australia. Games were suspended until the end of the war and from then on, until quite recent times, the game was largely the province of women. WW2 had a similar impact – competition was suspended, but the club persisted until a post war revival was possible. By this stage and beyond, unsurprisingly, women dominated committee positions. The photo below represents most of the club’s membership

Women’s clothing became far more practical and white was all the go. Summer Dress: “White and white flat rubber shoes. Stockings, sox and hat optional. Whites to be worn for pennants and tournaments”. The photo of the club ladies in front of the new club house in 1975 shows remarkable uniformity (spot the one not quite conforming).



**Almost all Active Members outside the 1975 Clubhouse**

Women playing bowls were dubbed “white leghorns” and the label was not intended as a compliment. It was part of a broad pattern of put-downs: keeping women in their place. Women were not allowed in the public bar and women drivers were regarded as, at best, barely competent. It is hard to imagine croquet women were not bleached with the same feathers, especially in Busselton where they were so closely located. The bowling and croquet club members must have felt some solidarity, although relationships between the two clubs were not always cordial as both sought to expand. ((For more detail under **History, the Bigger Picture.**)).

‘Croquet’ for the first hundred years of Busselton Croquet Club meant “Association Croquet”. Variations, such as Golf Croquet, were very much secondary to the main discipline. But Association was losing its appeal. –too difficult and time-consuming. Golf Croquet offered a simpler, more social game and with its introduction as THE game played at Busselton, membership began to increase. More men began to play. It is likely that the average age of the members also increased along with greater life expectancy, more women in the workforce, less sense of croquet as “just a woman’s game”. In short, a growing sense of gender equality. More men, more women made Busselton the largest regional club in WA.

The new clubhouse of 1975 may have been adequate for fewer than 30 members in the 70s, but its limitations and the desire for more lawn became pressing in the new century. Bowls, tennis and croquet were all making demands on the City Council for space and water. After fruitless negotiations with the tennis club, the council gave the club a bit of Churchill Park

Then, at the expense of the old '75 clubhouse, a between-lawns shelter and some peppermint trees, the club managed to find space for a third court, a new clubhouse and a machinery shed.

And, as is always the case, after a lot of hard work from the members, the new clubhouse and lawns were opened in 2019.





**Out with the 1975 Clubhouse**



**In with the New (First Half)**



**And Celebrations - No Feathers**



**Geographe Challenge 2020 – Not so Uniform**

Since 2019 the club has gained membership to the point that numbers have settled in the 70s, sometimes nudging into the eighties. We began battling patches of Nematodes and they remain an expensive challenge. Notwithstanding, the courts have settled and consolidated and the club aims to have them the best in the state. Many visitors would say they already are.

Playing standards have steadily improved and we are very proud of the achievements of Robyn Dart, our current (2022- 23) WA GC State Ladies' Open Singles Champion and, with Gary Phipps from Morabinda Club, the current and 2021 - 23 Open Doubles Champion. Robyn, as this goes to publication, has just come second in the Marjorie Parry Star Association Croquet Championship. Her achievement is, perhaps, an indication that Busselton Croquet Club is beginning to incorporate the game that was its foundation.