

## **Brighton Croquet Club History**

### Foundation

Croquet was played for many years in the nineteenth century on the lawns of large houses in Brighton (including that of "Tommy" Bent, Victorian Premier and land developer). An unofficial club was formed in December 1910 to play croquet on the lawn of a Mr Leith in William St. On 28 March 1911, at a meeting in the Brighton Town Hall, the group was enlarged and resolved to establish an official Croquet Club. Land was purchased, for 170 Pounds, beside the railway line near Middle Brighton station. Four lawns and a clubhouse were set up, for an official opening in December 1911.

The first inter-club matches were a home and away series in early 1912, against Sandringham, won by Brighton. In winter, when the club lawns were being refurbished, play continued on the lawns of Mr A. B. Were. Mr Were later made substantial donations to assist the club and became the first President of the Victorian Croquet Association (1914 - 1920).

### Mrs Bleazby

A key member of the first Committee was Mrs Elizabeth Bleazby (Tommy Bent's daughter) who had her own lawn at her home in Bay St. Mrs Bleazby, with others, helped fund the land purchase with interest free loans. In 1913 she was elected President of the club, a position she was to hold for nine years. She provided further loans and donations in those years.

The road from Male St. to the railway line, along the north boundary of the club's lawns, was named Bleazby Avenue, at the instigation of the club, in 1914. The Council charged the club for the making of the road, which remained a significant liability for years.

Mrs Bleazby was a dominating personality and ran the club her way, until concerns with a series of autocratic decisions without consulting the Committee lead to her resignation from the Presidency and the club. She left to establish another croquet club a couple of miles away in Warleigh Grove, North Brighton.

### Financial problems

The club faced various financial difficulties during World War I, after Mrs Bleazby's departure, in the nineteen twenties and during the Great Depression years in the nineteen thirties. But the worst was during World War II. After the war it became necessary to sell a block of land the club was not making much use of at the eastern (Male St) end of its holding. The proceeds were used to pay off the bank mortgage (used to pay out Mrs Bleazby when she left) and the liability for the road making.

### Later years

For its first ninety years the club concentrated on Association Croquet. Golf Croquet was first introduced in 1974, but took off in popularity from 2002. Club membership is now roughly evenly split between players of these two forms of mallet sports.

The club has won numerous pennant (inter club) competitions, and its members many individual honours at state and national levels. Some of the fruits of these can be seen displayed in the clubhouse.

The clubhouse was fully renovated in 1989, only to be severely damaged by a fire in 1992. It was rebuilt, and later further partly renovated in 2022.



Above: the lawns would often flood after big rains. A significant investment in improved drainage has reduced (not eliminated) the problem.

Below: the clubhouse after the 1992 fire.



### Sources

*A History of Croquet in Victoria* online at [croquetvic.asn.au](http://croquetvic.asn.au)  
(accessed 17/05/2023)

Atkinson, B 2011 *First Centenary of the Brighton Croquet Club*, Brighton Croquet Club Inc, Brighton Victoria



