Devonport has its croquet 80 years on

Beginnings

by Paul Titchener

Croquet is defined in the dictionary as "a game played on lawn, with two wooden balls that are driven through hoops with mallets".

Its origins, like so many games, have been lost with the passing of time but it is known to have been played in England and Ireland in the mid-1800s and the controlling body of the sport throughout the world, the London-based Croquet Association, was founded in 1897.

In 1914 the basic rules and tactics of the game, as played today, were evolved and since then competitive croquet has spread throughout the world.

But Garden Party Croquet with its wide hoops and rules to suit the convenience of each player was a great favourite with the genteel families of the Victorian and Edwardian eras and it was these people who brought the game to New Zealand, a reminder of "home".

A croquet lawn was always laid in the grounds of the colonial mansions, and the wealthy families of the North Shore, particularly at Devonport, were no exception.

However, "garden party" croquet was not popular with all players, many of whom wanted a more competitive game with universal rules.

In 1895 the Devonport Bowling Club was formed the third oldest club in Auckland and the male members of this club, although primarily interested in lawn bowls, also played croquet.

Their wives and families were also keen to play and in 1897 it was suggested that the men's winter bowls green be used in the summer months as a croquet lawn.

The fledgling bowls club agreed to the proposal and playing croquet by members and their families became so popular that in 1905 a separate club, the Devonport Croquet Club, was formed within the auspices of the Devonport Bowling Club.

However as men's lawn bowls became more popular and the membership of the Devonport Club increased, the croquet lawns were required during the summer months as bowling greens.

The development created problems and the bowling club was forced to ask the members of the croquet club, mainly women, to seek new playing lawns elsewhere.

Players from the Stanley Bay area decided to approach the Devonport Borough Council for a section of land in the newly reclaimed Stanley Bay Park. This park was developed from a reclaimed inlet of Ngataringa Bay, when the dredged mud from the extensions to the naval base was pumped across the road leading to Stanley Point in the year between 1921 and 1923.

In 1924 the croquet lawn for the Stanley Bay Club was laid and a most attractive little clubhouse was constructed.

This club flourished until the late 1950s when, with dwindling membership, the club was wound up. The clubhouse was demolished, although its concrete base remains, and the lawn is now part of a practice cricket pitch.

In 1930 the bowling club formally asked the Devonport Croquet Club to vacate its lawn, and the club, desperate for a new venue, approached the Devonport Borough Council for a suitable area of land to lay new lawns.

The council co-operated by making available a section of Alison Park, bordering Wairoa Rd, near the entrance to the clubhouse and stand of the Takapuna Jockey Club, which at this time was experiencing financial difficulties, which culminated in its demise in 1934.

Although the croquet club was grateful for the council's help, much work was needed to get the land suitable for playing croquet. Drains were laid, the labour being provided by council and topsoil was brought in to provide a suitable seed bed.

The area was levelled and sown and in February 1932, the new croquet lawns of the renamed Devonport Croquet Club, now proudly called the North Shore Croquet Club (Inc) was opened.

The pavilion was formerly a workman's cottage which had stood on the adjoining racecourse until it was moved to the croquet lawn. This pavilion has always been well maintained and has become an attractive asset to the area.

The opening membership was 45 and over the years has fluctuated between 40 and 60. In spite of small membership the club always employed a fulltime lawnkeeper and gardener who was often assisted by enthusiastic club members.

As a result the club grounds, through the 1930s and 1940s, were admired by the local residents. However the 1950s saw a decline in membership numbers brought about by natural attrition and competition from other sports, particularly golf.

A croquet club had been formed at Takapuna and many members who lived in the North Devonport and South Takapuna areas resigned from the Devonport Club and joined the new club, because it was more convenient to get public transport to the new organisation.

This drop in membership forced the club to return part of the land given by the council, because of the cost of maintenance.

However, in spite of these difficulties the North Shore Croquet Club remained active and the membership through the 1960s gradually increased until in 1970, the land returned to the council was requested by the club to once more be made available. The council agreed and in 1971 two new croquet lawns were laid to accommodate the new membership.

Through the 1970s the club improved its facilities by piping and covering the large open drain which ran along the road boundary, planting the adjacent areas in suitable vegetation and fencing the property with a wooden fence to provide shelter for the players.

Today the fine old club, which celebrates its 80th anniversary this year, has a steady membership of about 50 active members and provides a most desirable amenity for the croquet players of the southern North Shore area.

This map/plan is illustrative only and all information should be independently verified on site before taking any action. Copyright Auckland Council. Boundary information from LINZ (Crown Copyright Reserved). Whilst due care has been taken, Auckland Council gives no warranty as to the accuracy and completeness of any information on this map/plan and accepts no liability for any error, omission or use of the information. Height datum: Auckland 1946.

Stanley Bay CC 1959

N

Auckland Council
Te Kaunihera o Tāmaki Makaurau

Created: Sunday, 23 November 2014,10:51:36 a.m.

Scale @ A4 1:1000

This map/plan is illustrative only and all information should be independently verified on site before taking any action.Copyright Auckland Council. Boundary information from LINZ (Crown Copyright Reserved). Whilst due care has been taken, Auckland Council gives no warranty as to the accuracy and completeness of any information on this map/plan and accepts no liability for any error, omission or use of the information. Height datum: Auckland 1946.

Stanley Bay 2010

N

Auckland Council
Te Kaunihera o Tāmaki Makaurau

Created: Sunday, 23 November 2014,10:54:33 a.m.

Scale @ A4 1:1000

~~Possible~~ site of Stanley Bay Croquet Club
closed late 1950's

Stanley Bay 1930

CROQUET GREENS OPENED ON NEWLY-CONSTRUCTED SPORTS GROUND AT STANLEY BAY.
Members and friends who attended yesterday's official opening of the Stanley Bay Croquet Club's new greens by the president, Mrs. H. Percy.

since the beginning of the year sales have been blown open at post offices, railway stations, picture theatres and business premises from one end of the country to the other."

Football at Stanley Park.

"Next season we confidently anticipate being able to provide the players of Devonport with two more football grounds," reported Mr. C. Farquharson, chairman of the Devonport Borough Council's grounds committee, at last evening's meeting. "Stanley Park is now completely grassed, and will be available for play for the 1936 season. There is room on the park for two good playing fields, and this addition to Devonport's football facilities will be greatly appreciated." Mr. Farquharson further explained that the few bare patches of salty soil that remained as a carry-over from the harbour reclamation works that made the park were now being turfed, and this would complete the work of preparation for all sports. This consummation of Stanley Park as a recreation area will be much appreciated by the residents of the district. It has now five tennis courts, two croquet lawns, and a children's recreation area, all constructed on what was formerly a mangrove swamp, and provides a notable instance of successful local endeavour in the way of district improvements.

CROQUET.

STANLEY BAY CLUB.

An afternoon in aid of the Dominion Gift and Regimental Fund was held on the Stanley Bay croquet lawns on Thursday. Various croquet competitions were played, the prizes being won by Mesdames Prime, Wyatt, Bowers, Hudson, Payne, and Sommerville. A stall at which home-made jams, cakes, sweets, and fancy bags were sold helped to swell the funds, the proceeds being over £16.