

## Bookham U3A croquet

### THANK YOU MARTIN!

To mark his retirement from twenty five years of running the Bookham u3a croquet group, I sent Martin some questions with the intention of writing an article. What came back needed no further input other than the photos we inserted.

Some things worth mentioning. Martin devised lesson plans for new players and advice and tuition was freely given to anyone who asked. Martin and Trudi introduced many of us to the wonders of Surbiton Croquet Club and arranged a day during the season where we could use their immaculate lawns. Excellent coaches from Surbiton came to Polesden on several occasions for a day of coaching arranged by Martin. (We were all on our best behaviour).

Martin arranged two tournaments every season for many years and as you see he and Trudi hosted lovely Sunday croquet picnics in their garden. Happy days.

Martin was our direct conduit to the National Trust without which we probably couldn't play, and hosted committee meetings in his home.

We thank Martin and appreciate his many years of directing the overall group. He and Trudi still run their own groups so we hope many happy hours of playing await and that Martin "retires" knowing he's left the largest u3a group in the very safe hands of David Snow, helped by Peter Jackson.

*Val Cross (on behalf of Bookham u3a Croquet)*



Thinking back, the first time I ran a croquet hoop was probably on my grandparent's lawn in Birmingham shortly after The War. The bug bit and I have played, whenever the opportunity arose, ever since then. I played as a teenager with family and friends at home in Abingdon and when I was confined to a rather long stay at the John Radcliffe hospital in Oxford I chose croquet for an occupational therapy and enjoyed passing time on their lawns with nurses and other patients.

Warp forward to 1970 when we moved to Bookham. We made sure we had a garden with space enough for a few croquet hoops which served as a good training ground for our three boys who soon learnt the basics and much time was spent in friendly competition.

Around this time Bookham U3A was formed and I joined the table tennis

and badminton group which played weekly in the old community centre opposite The Anchor from October to April. With nothing planned for the summer months a few of us got together with the intention of starting a croquet group, but first we had to find a suitable lawn on which to play. We looked at several possibilities including some garden lawns, too small, a nice big space at The Grange, too bumpy, and finally Polesden Lacey, close to perfect with space for four half size lawns, a management who were keen, and so Bookham U3A Croquet Group was born. I guess it was around 1998. There were about eight of us at the start with John Bedford as our leader and soon we were



playing for a couple of hours one day a week through the summer.

I took over from John a couple of years later and our numbers continued to grow. Wanting to know more about the game my wife Trudi and I joined a mainstream croquet club at Surbiton where we realised we were not playing to modern rules or tactics and we had a lot to learn. We were also introduced to a new form of croquet to us, Golf Croquet (GC) having only played the older form, Association Croquet (AC) up until then. GC is a game with fewer strokes, simpler tactics and is easier to learn than AC and today two of our six groups are dedicated to it.



To help pass on some of the new techniques and ideas we invited Michael Hague, the training officer from The South East Croquet Federation, to spend a day coaching our group leaders which helped to set us on the right lines. We also

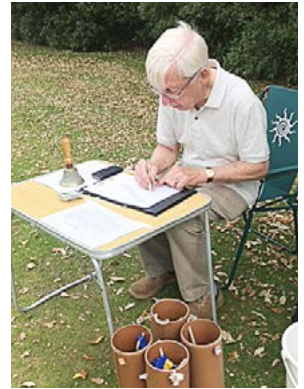
introduced a beginner's section at the start of each season where dedicated members, in true U3A style, could run a series of coaching sessions to pass on their knowledge and expertise and prepare newcomers ready to join in with the more experienced players.

To allow for a bit of socialising we introduced an annual picnic. Initially held in my garden, where members and friends brought a packed lunch, played a bit of fun garden croquet and had the opportunity to meet members

from other groups. After a few years this event was moved to Polesden Lacey where it is still a summer fixture.

Annual tournaments were started, not only for the fun and interest of competition, but also to allow members to play against others from different groups. The engraved names of winners date back to 2003.

Croquet is a game where, like many others, the precise position of boundaries is important. To begin with we had just corner pegs and had to squint along them to decide whether a ball was on or off. Disputes were not uncommon so we tried stretching a cord between the pegs to mark the boundaries. This was better but still not perfect and a bit of a trip hazard. Then one keen couple, the Sheltons, offered us a white lining machine, ancient but still in good working order and Polesden management agreed for us to use it. Our thanks are due not only for the gift of the machine but also to Frank and Val Cross and others who refresh the white lines on a weekly basis. Boundary disputes are now a thing of the past.



We have continued to work closely with the National Trust at Polesden Lacey who now have four lawns and we have around 70 members playing on 4 days a week. I have passed the leadership baton on to David Snow but still look forward to playing the sport that has given me such enjoyment for so many years.



*Martin Pulsford*