

A Brief History of Croquet in Victoria

Croquet is understood to have been introduced to England from Ireland in the early 1850's and was probably played in Victoria shortly after as there is reference to a Croquet Club in Kyneton in 1866. Other early records are Lilydale (1894), Ballarat City (1902), and Bendigo, Bright, Ballarat Western and Melbourne clubs in 1904.

The Victorian Croquet Association came into being on 18th June 1914, following a meeting of players interested in forming an association called on 17th February of that year. The first Council meeting was held on 2nd October 2014 when a Patron, President, two Vice Presidents, an Honorary Secretary and an Honorary Treasurer were elected by an attendance of 21 delegates.

A Pennant Competition commenced that season (1914-15) and the first Victorian Open Championships were held at the Melbourne Croquet Club in 1915-16.

A list of clubs, published on 1st January 1915, showed 20 affiliated clubs – 18 metropolitan (including Werribee) and two country (Ballarat City and Bendigo). Following formation of the Ballarat (1918), Geelong (1921) and Gippsland (1924) Associations, the number of affiliated country clubs rose to 27 by 1927 and peaked at 131 in 1956 which, together with the 30 metropolitan clubs, represented the height of croquet in Victoria

VCA was not the first State Association – that was the Tasmanian Croquet Association in 1908, followed by Victoria (1914), South Australia (1916), NSW (1918), Qld (1922) and WA (1928). In 1917 VCA was granted affiliation with the (English) Croquet Association.

There was, in the 1920's, an enthusiastic player off a handicap of -3 who, in order to get enough play, was a member of five clubs in Melbourne. This self-made millionaire donated a trophy for competition between the (English) Croquet Association and the VCA. This was the MacRobertson Shield which became the prestigious international competition between Australia, England, New Zealand and the United States. Later knighted for services to Victoria and philanthropy in general, the donor was Sir Macpherson Robertson who also a co-founder of the regional carrier, MacRobertson Miller Airlines.

In 1963 the Women's Amateur Sports Council notified VCA that it would only accept a representative if all office bearers were women. VCA complied with this condition until 1977 when it withdrew from that organisation. Meanwhile, in 1966 VCA had become a founding member of the Sports Council of Victoria (now Vicsport).

The Warleigh club was established on Mrs EH Bleazby's "Warleigh" estate in 1923 and after her death in 1947 the site was offered first to the Warleigh Club (which declined) and then to VCA which accepted in 1948 and established the facility as its headquarters, where it remained until its sale and the construction of and move to the Victorian Croquet Centre at Cairnlea in 2005/06.

VCA currently comprises of some 90 clubs and 2700+ members.