

Croquet for All

That's our motto. It says so on the gate so all Blewburians have world class lawns within a mile of their own gates. In late 2022, the England team for the Macpherson Robertson Shield, croquet's answer to the Ashes, spent their final practice weekend here en route to triumph in Melbourne. And you would be equally welcome. That wouldn't happen at Lords, let alone Wimbledon, where croquet was the senior partner at the All England club until lawn tennis eclipsed it in 1882.



Dead cert: secretary David Long lines up

For Jolyon Kay, establishing Blewbury Croquet Club (BCC) was a labour of love, not only of the game but of the village he saw as home. Starting in 1993, the chemical engineer who left Harwell to join the diplomatic service set up the first hoops on derelict turf on what are now the tennis courts. Paul Wolff, then a relative newcomer, well remembers joining a dozen shivering neighbours on a chilly April evening for the inaugural session.

It was Jolyon's good fortune that Malcolm and Deirdre Cochrane allowed the embryo club to gain traction over the next decade on the lawn in their garden, but the £73,000 he raised to establish the current premises on Ticklers Folly Field in 2003 owed nothing to luck. It included £42,000 of lottery funding, plus grants from the Vale of the White Horse and Blewbury Parish Council.

As a result of Jolyon's enterprise and the dedication of those who followed him, BCC is on the Croquet England tournament rota throughout the summer. These players wear white, which may give dog walkers and families using the playground a false impression of Edwardian gentility. Year round, members play in almost all weather, wearing flat shoes and whatever else they please.

At BCC, they also play what they please. The two codes, Association Croquet (AC), and Golf Croquet (GC), use the basic strokes in contrasting ways. AC, which has evolved from the original game, is subtle and tactical. GC, easier to learn at grass roots level, is faster and more accessible. Turn up after lunch and, given a good eye, you can contribute to a doubles game by tea. Even without one, you'll play a part. As with one day cricket, GC is ever more popular, so much so that many smaller clubs have cut out AC altogether. Not Blewbury which has two weekly roll up afternoons for each discipline.

Too good to be true? Find out for yourself before you call me a liar! For the next six weeks, BCC is offering introductory sessions on Mondays from 17.00 - 18.30 (May 20-June 24 inclusive). A committee member will be there to meet you and explain the game; you'll choose from a selection of club mallets and try it out for yourself. No booking in, no payment, just remember the flat-soled shoes.

If you wanted to take it further, secretary David Long or membership secretary Philippa Turner would make a rendezvous for another session. Again no charge - but be aware that croquet is dangerously addictive. At least Blewburians can follow the dream on the doorstep.

www.blewburycroquetclub.org.uk.