

## CROQUET

# Think on your feet

One of our new Subject Advisers is Sally Slater on croquet. Here, we find out more about the game

**D**o you like a game where you can out-think your opponent, a game of strategy and skill, angles and tactics, all while being out in the fresh air? Well, croquet might be the game for your U3A.

Modern croquet is played on smooth, short grass so balls run freely after a tap from a high-tech mallet through solid but tight hoops. And did you know there are several versions: the more technical Association Croquet, one called Golf, not to mention Garden Croquet.

John Dawson of Chester U3A plays with the Cheshire county team. He is also on the governing body of The Croquet Association.

"I started Association Croquet," he says. "I was always a good putter at golf and enjoyed playing the ball accurately. The tactics of Association Croquet are more technical and I enjoy working it out."

"There is also a handicap system, so a beginner can play against a better player. Golf Croquet is simpler, but the standard of play remains very high."

The higher the standard of play, the smaller the hoop. If your opponent's ball is blocking your way, you can attempt a jump shot – leaping your ball over your opponent's. As in snooker, you can position your ball to outwit your opponent.

"Top-level croquet lawns are lightning fast,"



John Dawson of Chester U3A also plays for the county team



Sally Slater, U3A national Subject Adviser for croquet, in action

*“While playing, you forget all your worries because you are concentrating on the game”*

says John. “You only need to touch the ball gently.” Players start with a handicap of 24. John’s is three. Getting to a high standard requires practice; John plays two or three times a week during the season.

The benefits are many, he says. “It’s moderate exercise in the fresh air, with the benefits of learning a new skill. While you are playing you forget all your worries because you are concentrating on the game.”

If you would like to set up a croquet group contact U3A Subject Advisor Sally Slater ([u3a@croquet.org.uk](mailto:u3a@croquet.org.uk)) or visit the croquet section of the U3A website. The Croquet Association has development officers who advise on setting up groups and clubs.

For details of clubs where you might play while on holiday and National Croquet Week (May 11-17), visit [croquet.org.uk](http://croquet.org.uk)

## WHAT DO YOU NEED TO PLAY?

### FOOTWEAR

Flat, stout shoes or trainers

### CLOTHING

Fleeces and waterproofs for bad weather. Flapping trousers are to be avoided – brushing a ball could be a foul

### EQUIPMENT

Most clubs have a selection of mallets to borrow until you decide you want your own. Prices start at about £180. Made from wood, metal and carbon fibre, mallets come in different weights and heights to suit different statures.

**FEES** Club fees vary depending on where you live.

## U3A CROQUET CLUBS

Some U3As, including Sheffield and Congleton, set up their own clubs and find their own places to play, such as a local cricket club. Others, such as Kingston in Surrey and Ilkley in Yorkshire, strike up a relationship with established clubs – Surbiton and Ben Rhydding, respectively. Ben Rhydding Croquet Club began life as a U3A group in 2005. It runs six-week training courses for Ilkley and District U3A. Harrogate U3A is affiliated to Bishop Monkton Croquet Club.