



THE UNOFFICIAL HISTORY OF CROQUET

David Graham

SOUVENIR EDITION

THE (UNOFFICIAL) HISTORY OF CROQUET

There is no reference in Genesis to croquet having been played in the Garden of Eden, but that did not deter the sculptor Tullio Lombardo from creating his Renaissance masterpiece depicting Adam taking croquet.

The first known reference to croquet having been played in antiquity is a carving in an obscure corner of the temple of Kom Ombo in Upper Egypt, which depicts croquet being played in a form that is still recognisable today. In fact, croquet seems to have been a popular sport in ancient Egypt and was played by the pharaohs, some of whom had mallets, hoops and balls entombed with their mummified remains so that they could play croquet in the afterlife.

There are references to croquet in classical Greek literature in the writings of Homer and it may even have been played in the ancient Olympics. There are also references to croquet in Cicero's letters, which intriguingly refer to the difficulty of playing while wearing a toga. However, no record exists of croquet being played in Britain before the Norman Conquest, suggesting that the Romans did not export the game to Britannia.

The Normans introduced croquet to Britain, as depicted in two of the panels in the Bayeux Tapestry. This shows the game being played on foot and on horseback, the latter possibly being the precursor to polo. The mounted version appears to use larger hoops and balls. The mallets had handles made from yew with oak mallet heads, while the balls were

also made from oak and painted, although the colours, which relied on the availability of natural dyes, were more muted than the modern day equivalent. Yew trees are poisonous to livestock and were therefore grown in churchyards, being the only fenced area in the village, but they were in demand for making bows in the medieval period and the source of wood for mallets subsequently died out. There is an intriguing reference in Anglo-Norman literature to their favourite mid-game meal comprising melted cheese on toasted bread, called croquet monsieur, as croquet was an exclusively male preserve at the time. This was later abbreviated in the medieval period to the more familiar name that we know today.

The game appears to have disappeared until it re-emerged in the 17th century as pell-mell or palle-malle, which was played in what is now Pall Mall. This is often cited as the beginning of croquet in Britain, ignoring its 11th century origins.

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Temple of Kom Ombo 180 - 47 BC

THE (UNOFFICIAL) HISTORY OF CROQUET: PART 2

The game of croquet originated in ancient Egypt and spread to Europe in the Greco-Roman period during the 1st century BC (see *The Unofficial History of Croquet: Croquet Gazette* - April 2023), but it also developed in other civilizations independent of any contact with European culture, notably in Central and South America and parts of Asia.

However, croquet does not appear to have been played by the general populace in these cultures and was instead reserved for the deity or priesthood. This is particularly notable at Hampi, capital of the 14th century Vijayanagara Empire, situated in modern-day central India. The Crocus Temple, named after its carvings depicting crocus flowers, in the south-east corner of the ancient city, is interesting due to the similarity of its layout to a croquet court. This connection is reinforced by descriptions of its religious ceremonies, in which the priests would follow a prescribed route, passing through six pavilions in the sequence numbered on the plan (Fig. 1), before entering the shrine. The location of the pavilions exactly matches the layout of the hoops in a game of croquet, with the shrine occupying the position of the peg. There is also a description of a longer ceremony in which the procession also passed through the pavilions in reverse before approaching the shrine.

The sequence resulted in either six or twelve pavilions being visited before entering the shrine at the end, which resonates with the importance placed by ancient civilizations on mathematics, and in particular the prime numbers seven and thirteen, which were thought to impart magical powers, hence the association with the deity. The pavilion entrances have architraves resembling croquet hoops (Fig. 2), which are also flanked by figures holding mallets. In fact, croquet was considered to be the game of the gods, as depicted in a carving of Shiva playing croquet in the Brihadishvara Temple in Thanjavur, South India (Fig. 3).

The question of whether croquet developed independently in India or was influenced by contact with ancient cultures in Europe is unresolved, but no such ambiguity surrounds civilizations in the Americas prior to the arrival of Spanish and Portuguese conquistadores in the 16th century.

There is evidence of croquet having been played by the Incas, as indicated by the ceramic bottle depicting a croquet player (Fig. 4), one of several discovered at Machu Picchu in Peru. It is now thought that the central terrace in the 15th century citadel may have been a croquet court, as its dimensions exactly replicate the proportions of croquet courts known to have existed elsewhere in the Americas. However, it is the Zapotec civilization of Central America which displays the best preserved examples of croquet courts, notably the great court at Monte Albán in Oaxaca, central Mexico, which until recently was simply described as a ball court, but is now known to have been dedicated to playing croquet.

This was discovered following the analysis of charcoal found just below the surface, which puzzled archaeologists until the pattern was identified as being that of a croquet court (Fig 5). It is now believed that the hoops and peg were burnt at the end of a game in which priests competed against captives of war, possibly with an inbuilt advantage of heavier mallets such as the one depicted in the figurine from Monte Albán of a seated deity with croquet balls and a hoop completing the ensemble (Fig 6). The court has now been set out showing the position of the hoops and peg.

There seems little doubt that croquet was a game associated with the deity in ancient civilizations and may not have been played outside of the priesthood. However, what does seem to be a common theme is that playing croquet will be available in the afterlife.

I David Graham

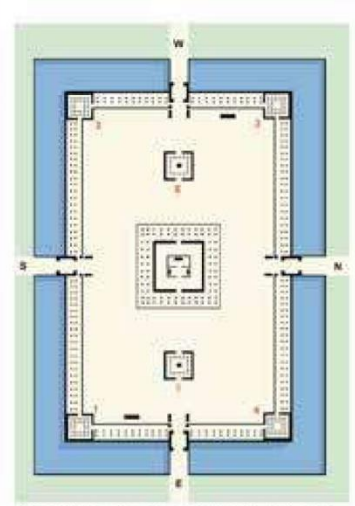


Fig. 1: Crocus Temple Plan - Hampi



Fig 2: Pavilion - Crocus Temple



Fig 3: Shiva - Thanjavur Temple



Fig. 6: Zapotec Figurine



Fig. 5: Croquet Court - Monte Alban



Fig. 4: Inca Figurine



Shiva - Brihadishvara Temple Thanjavur

THE (UNOFFICIAL) HISTORY OF CROQUET: PART 3

CROQVET MAXIMVS

The relationship between croquet and the deity in ancient civilisations has been conclusively established by research carried out at the croquet court sites now known to have existed in the ancient world (see *The Unofficial History of Croquet: Croquet Gazette* - June 2023), but these are in general small in scale. This cannot be said of the Nazca Lines, a group of geoglyphs in the Nazca Desert in southern Peru, which feature a combination of straight lines and figures that can only be seen from the air and were undoubtedly meant to be viewed by the gods, so it is significant that one of the giant figures depicts a monkey god playing croquet (Fig. 1). We know that croquet was considered to be the favourite game of the gods in Ancient Greece and references to it appear in several Greek myths. There was a god of croquet named Krocus (Crocus), who was also associated with longevity, possibly a reference to the length of the game, and several figurines depicting the ancient winged god holding a mallet and ball have been discovered at temple sites dedicated to him (Fig. 2). The Greeks played two versions, which were almost identical to those played today. They were called short and long croquet, the latter being described by Homer as lasting several hours and consequently not popular as a spectator sport. Temples dedicated to Krocus always incorporated the figures seven and thirteen in their dimensions, notably the number of spaces between the columns on the short and long sides of the temple, another reference to

the different versions played. The most famous Greek myth involving croquet describes the ancient Cretan labyrinth at Knossos. A surviving mosaic from the palace of King Minos depicts the layout of the labyrinth, which includes seven chambers arranged in the pattern of the hoops and peg on a croquet court (Fig 4). The connection between croquet and the labyrinth is further reinforced by the discovery of a bronze figurine depicting the Minotaur holding a mallet and ball (Fig. 3). The myth describes seven Athenian youths and seven maidens being sent to be devoured by the Minotaur each year, before he was slayed by Theseus. The Romans were avid croquet players. Its status can be deduced from the number of courts that existed at Hadrian's Villa, near Tivoli. These are now known to have been grass courts, which involved a high level of maintenance, hence their status. However, it was the Romans who elevated croquet to a spectator sport in huge arenas, notably in games played between gladiators (Fig 5). These could be quite violent, as disputes over faults often resulted in a fight to the death. There were also strict rules around timing, and games that went over time usually resulted in wild animals being released into the arena to determine the outcome. The large crowds attracted by gladiatorial croquet may not return to the modern game, but clubs could still improve their prospects by installing a shrine dedicated to Krocus.

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Fig. 1: Nazca Lines



Fig. 2: Krocus Figurine



Fig. 3: Minotaur - Bronze 520-500BC



Fig. 4: Labyrinth Mosaic



Fig. 5: Roman Croquet Arena



THE (UNOFFICIAL) HISTORY OF CROQUET: PART 4 CROQUET AND COMMUNISM

In pre-communist Romanov Russia, only the Tsar, nobles and the professional classes played croquet, which collectively amounted to only 2% of society. The remaining population was dominated by the peasant class and so croquet was considered bourgeois by the incoming Bolsheviks.

It is therefore surprising that croquet was a favourite pastime of post-revolutionary communist leaders. Lenin is known to have been an excellent croquet player, as was Stalin, who actively promoted the sport. However, croquet was established as a proletariat pastime as early as 1917, when the Communist Croquet Club of the People (СССР) was established, featuring as its symbol the mallet, hoop and ball motif that appeared on propaganda posters such as the one shown, with the caption Croquet For All. The motif appears to have been the inspiration for the iconic hammer and sickle symbol that became widely copied by communist regimes following its adoption in Russia, but the role of croquet in establishing the most recognisable symbol of communism is not widely appreciated.

A notable feature of how croquet was played in communist Russia was the absence of handicapping, as everyone was considered to be equal under communist doctrine. This obviously benefitted the better players and score cards kept in the Kremlin official archive reveal that Stalin always won his games, although it is not known whether this was due to his opponents' abilities, or a desire to avoid a prolonged period in one of the Gulag camps where croquet was not on the curriculum. It is therefore not so surprising that croquet was also a favourite pastime of Chairman Mao, who similarly promoted the game, as can be seen from the 1967 poster shown, which features the mallet, hoop and ball symbol adopted by the organisation of Communist Peoples Croquet (CPC) and the caption Croquet For All. However, communist China did not suffer from the same contradiction whereby croquet could be seen as an elitist sport, as there is no record of it having been played by the emperors. The terms used were similar to their Western equivalent, except that during the four years of The Great Leap Forward, jump shots were renamed leap shots.

In fact, playing croquet quickly became an important aspect of diplomacy in China, whereby matches were played at the conclusion of conferences attended by foreign dignitaries, the most famous being the games played between Chairman Mao and Ho Chi Min in 1955 (pictured) and Richard Nixon in 1972. The Nixon game was not widely reported in the Western press, as he lost 26-0.

However, one of the lesser known venues for croquet played by a communist leader is Ealing Croquet Club, when in 1961 Fidel Castro and Che Guevara attended an International Communist Party conference held at Ealing Town Hall. The only surviving record of the match is a postcard (pictured), recently discovered by the club in the local Ealing Historical Society archive.

The irony is that in England playing croquet is associated with vicarage lawns and Oxbridge quadrangles; whereas in reality it has a much more proletarian heritage, whereby Croquet For All may be a more appropriate slogan for modern-day clubs.

I David Graham



Chairman Mao 1967 Poster



合所有人的槌球

THE (UNOFFICIAL) HISTORY OF CROQUET: PART 5 CROQVET OMNIBVS

The phrase Croquet For All may sound contemporary, but its use dates back to the 12th century. Croquet arrived in Britain during the Norman conquest (see The Unofficial History of Croquet: Croquet Gazette - April 2023) and was played almost exclusively by the barons. The foremost exponent of the game was Simon of Tewksbury (1116-1180), who was granted lands by Henry I in Gloucestershire and around the village of Ealing, to the west of London. In fact, Simon was so enamoured with the sport that he adopted Croquet Omnibus as his family motto, also incorporating croquet emblems on his coat of arms. This can be seen in a later illustration of 'The Knight' in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, which is clearly intended to represent Simon of Tewksbury, such was his enduring fame (Fig. 1). Simon was a participant in the Second Crusade (1145-1149) and spent much of his time in the impressive fortification of Krak des Chevaliers in Syria, which had been occupied by the Knights Hospitaller in 1142, and where Simon continued his passion for croquet. Fig. 6 shows a plan of the castle with three croquet courts marked with the letter K. The prominence that the game established in the daily lives of the knights can be gauged from contemporary accounts which refer to its nickname as Kroc des Chevaliers, a reference to the ancient Greek god of croquet, Krocus.

On his return from the crusades, Simon divided his time between his estates in Gloucestershire and Ealing, occasionally visiting court, but spending most of his time hunting and playing croquet. It was Simon who laid down most of the laws that still apply to the modern game.

He was buried in a side chapel in Tewksbury Abbey, where his tomb can be seen sporting the emblems of his principal passion, croquet (Fig. 2), including the oldest surviving example of a medieval mallet. His helmet still sits on the tomb (Fig. 5) and his shield hangs on the wall above (Fig. 3), both embellished with the emblem of a hare running a hoop on a laurel wreath, from which the term rabbit run originates. It is mainly due to the influence of Simon of Tewksbury that croquet maintained its popularity amongst the nobility during the medieval period (Fig. 4), whereas it is bowls that appears to have been the game of choice lower down the social scale. This can be attributed to the divisions existing between Anglo Saxon and Norman society. The different approach inherent in each of these competitive games might be the result of the contrasting approach to combat at the time of the Norman conquest, whereby bowls is played from an essentially static position compared to the more dynamic tactics involved in croquet, similar to the contrast between the Saxon shield wall and the more mobile Norman cavalry. The social divide continued right up to the period of the English Civil War, when bowls was favoured by the parliamentarians, whilst croquet maintained its support amongst the royalists. The bowls, which were slightly larger than their modern equivalent, were called roundheads, which is where the term originated. However, bowls also became popular amongst royalists beyond the influence of London, which is why it became known as crown bowls in the north. Simon of Tewksbury, like most of the nobility, adopted the chivalric principal of supporting the poor by supplying them with bread on saints' days, which in his case was dispensed from his croquet lawns at Ealing. This was called Lammas bread, from the old English for loaf-mass, which gave its name to Lammas Park in Ealing, where croquet is still played today.

| David Graham



Fig 1.



Fig 2.



Fig 3.

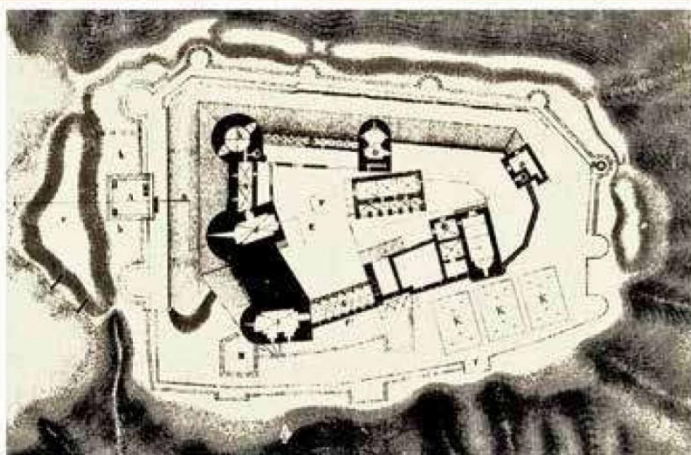


Fig 6.



Fig 5.

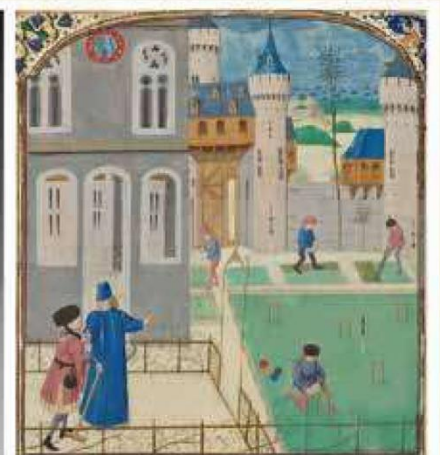


Fig 4.



Simon of Tewksbury (1116 - 1180) Tomb

THE (UNOFFICIAL) HISTORY OF CROQUET: PART 6 CROQUET AND MYSTICISM

There has always been a close link between mysticism and mathematics, particularly the number seven, which ancients associated with having magical powers, hence the seven levels of consciousness and the seven colours of the rainbow. So, it is not surprising that croquet, which was played by the gods in ancient Greece, should incorporate the number seven prominently in all its forms, from setting out the playing court and its constituent dimensions to the number of hoops and peg.

Temples dedicated to the god of croquet, Krococ (Crococ), incorporated proportions that replicated those of the croquet court, combined with those of the golden section (Fig. 1). The principal façade had seven spaces between the columns, whilst other dimensions were based on multiples of seven, as in the setting out of a modern croquet court (28 x 35 yds). The height and width were exactly half that of the court, or a quarter of its area, symbolising the four balls. The eight roundels above the columns represent the primary and secondary colours and were originally painted to match, while the Tympanum typically displayed heroic groups of figures playing croquet (Fig. 2). The Frieze would also contain croquet playing figures, such as in the example which shows the participants sitting out during a game of mixed doubles (Fig. 3). The whole would normally be topped by a gilded figure of Krococ. The ancient Greek croquet courts normally had tiered seating along their long sides, unlike the more familiar amphitheatres where plays were performed. This arrangement was copied in the English parliament, whereas it is the amphitheatre that is more common in legislative chambers in modern democracies. It was Homer who commented that spectators facing each other tended to result in more rowdy crowd behaviour, not unlike our own parliament. The number seven also features prominently in ancient depictions of the human form, notably in Vitruvian Man, a drawing by the Italian Renaissance artist and croquet player Leonardo da Vinci, which was influenced by the proportional theories of the Roman architect Vitruvius. There are several versions, but the most interesting is one that superimposes the layout of a croquet court onto the figure with outstretched limbs contained within a circle (Fig. 4), in which the central axis of hoops and peg correspond to the man's vital organs. The heart and brain are aligned with the peg and hoop six respectively, whilst hoop five is traditionally associated with fertility in ancient cultures.

There is no evidence that croquet was played in Britain prior to the Norman conquest, but the proportions incorporated into Vitruvian Man appear to have been understood as early as the Iron Age, as can be seen in the group of wood henges that survive near the village of Thornborough in North Yorkshire (Fig. 6). The central axis is aligned with magnetic north, with the centre circle occupying the position of the peg in a game of croquet, or the heart in depictions of ancient man. The alignment of axes linking the hoop positions also links up with other Neolithic sites around Britain and locations as far away as Brittany and the Shetland Isles. A recently completed study of Saxon England by Oxford University using aerial photography and ground penetrating radar has identified an intriguing pattern of settlements matching the position of the hoops and peg on a croquet court, with Oxford corresponding to Hoop 5, with its central axis aligned with Thornborough (Fig. 5). The pattern is also interesting because it may have been important in astrology, in particular, its alignment with the thirteenth sign of the zodiac, Crocos, god of croquet (Fig. 7). The precursors of the calendar we use today also derived from the dimensions of the croquet court, principally the numbers seven and thirteen, signifying the days of the week and four seasons of thirteen weeks, replicated in the scores in the short and long versions of the game, so that every day of our lives is linked to playing croquet.

I David Graham

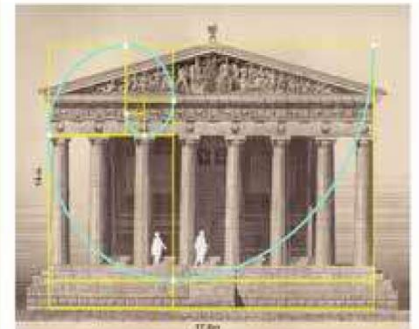


Fig 1. Temple of Crocos



Fig 2. Tympanum



Fig 3. Frieze

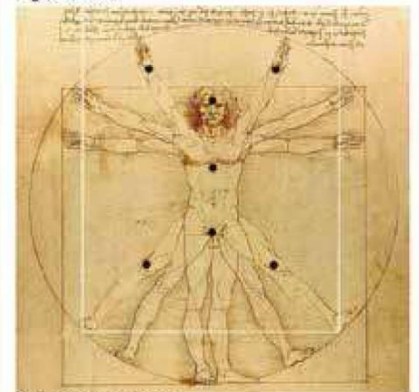


Fig 4. Vitruvian Man



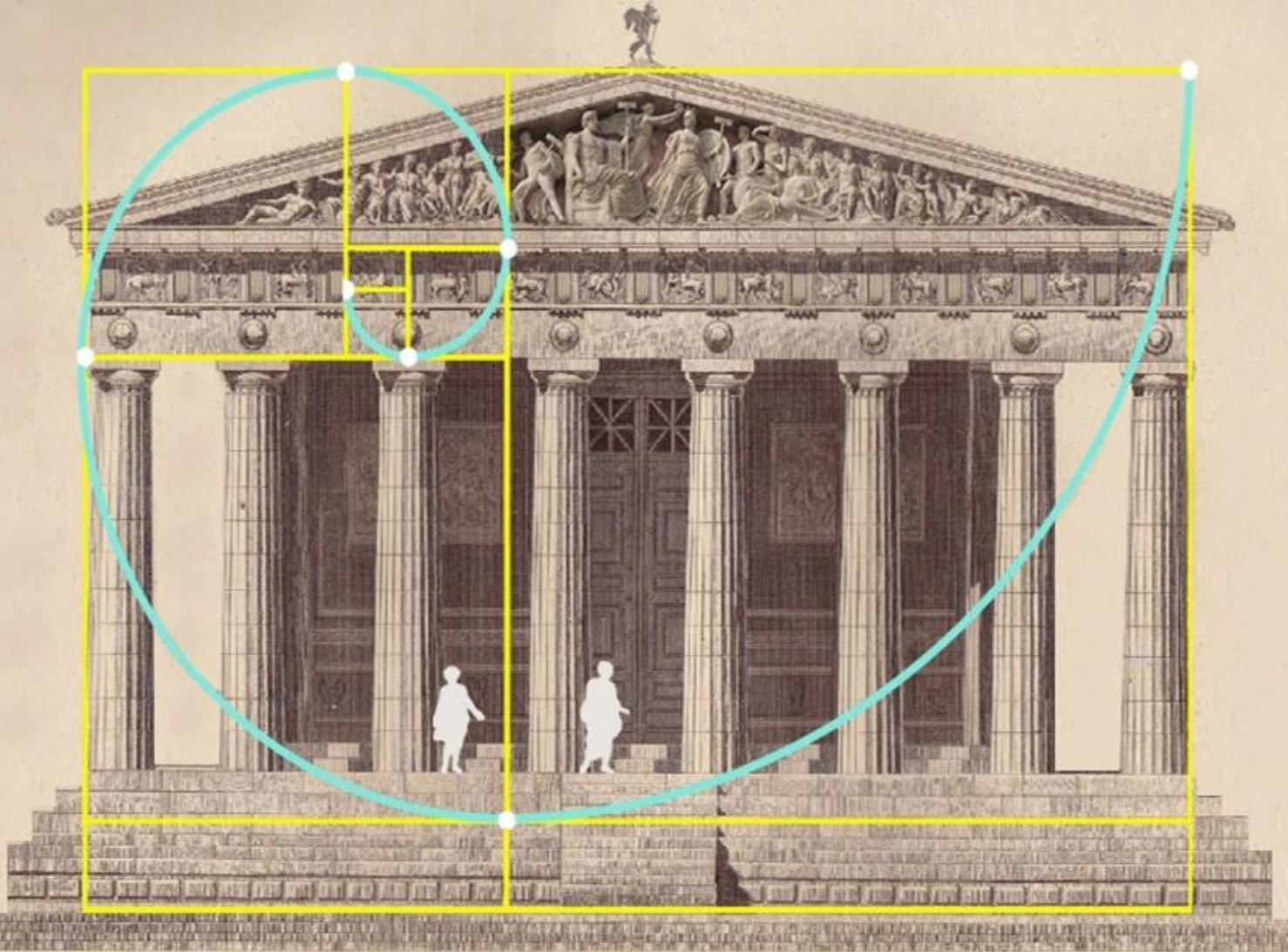
Fig 7. Crocos Zodiac Sign



Fig 6. Thornborough



Fig 5. Saxon England



Temple of Krokos 443 - 437 BC

THE (UNOFFICIAL) HISTORY OF CROQUET: PART 7 CROQUET AND MYTHOLOGY

The principles linking croquet to ancient religions are long established, so much so that courses studying the relationship between croquet and mythology have recently been added to the curriculum of several of the newer universities.

The relationship can be traced back to the ancient Mesopotamian religions practised between 6000BC and 400AD. The surviving records explain the connection between religion and cosmology, and modern scholars have now established that the layout of the croquet court was a physical representation of the seven heavens, symbolised by its six hoops and a peg. The participants in the game also represent the perpetual battle between good and evil, as seen in the bas-relief from the temple of Ninurta at Kalhu depicting a contest between the mallet-wielding Sun God and the Chaos Monster (Fig.4). The Chaos Monster was a formidable opponent, particularly when executing its signature shot, hitting in from the boundary to ricochet off each of the other balls to send them to the four corners of the court.

A similar concept can be found in medieval European representations of the seven heavens, as depicted in a wood carving from 1475 (Fig.1) showing seven celestial bodies consisting of the five classical planets known in antiquity - Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn - in addition to the Sun and Moon. The pattern is a slightly distorted version of the layout of a croquet court, with the sun in the position of the centre peg and the moon at hoop six. In the short game, it was the golden hoop which represented the sun. There is also evidence that playing croquet was adopted in medieval monasteries to instruct novice monks in the metaphysical concepts of the seven heavens, in which the hoops represented gateways into each of the seven levels. In Greek mythology, each gateway is opened by an old man in the guise of Krocus (Crocus), god of croquet. The monks also carried a string of beads to help them keep track of the score, which is thought to have been the origin of rosary beads. The concept of heaven comprising seven levels also features prominently in Islamic religion, so that the symbolism surrounding croquet may be seen as a unifying force in the medieval world. The pattern of the hoops and peg in croquet could also refer to the seven levels of the underworld, also known as The Gates of Hell, in order to instruct the monks in the different forms of punishment that may be encountered by deviating from the path of virtue.

The medieval game also included symbolic elements that have been retained in its modern equivalent, namely the colour of the primary and secondary balls, as double banking seems to have been the norm in antiquity. The secondary colours represented the four seasons, as is the case today, but the order of play for the primary colours appears to have been different, with play starting with yellow, representing sunrise, followed by blue for daytime, red for sunset and black for night time.

The concept of the hoops in croquet representing gateways into heaven's seven levels is also a feature of oriental mythology, in particular the Japanese Shinto religion, in which the gateways (Torii) have a distinctive double bar across the top. A larger version is also used to mark the entrance to shrines. The shrine would have a gong to summon worshippers, hung from a Torii in the form of a croquet ball running the hoop (Fig.2). The keeper of the gateways is typically depicted as an old man resting on a croquet mallet (Fig.3).

In Japan, croquet was typically played by Geishas, entertainers trained in the Japanese performing arts, due to the fact that it was the only sport that could be played wearing a kimono. The game was closely linked to tea ceremonies (Chashitsu), which usually took place in a tea room opening onto a croquet lawn (Fig.5).

The concept of croquet as a form of religious instruction relating to the workings of the cosmos is common throughout western and oriental cultures, but the question remains as to who in the modern game would merit the sobriquet of Chaos Monster.

I David Graham

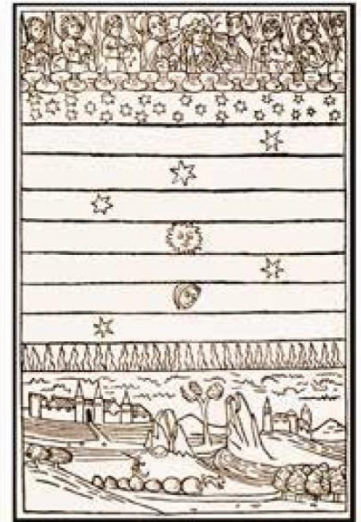


Fig 1. Seven Heavens Woodcut



Fig 2. Shinto Torii and Gong



Fig 3. Shinto Gate Keeper



Fig 5. Geisha Croquet Players



Fig 4. Sun God .v. Chaos Monster



Chaos Monster - Temple of Ninurta Kalhu

THE (UNOFFICIAL) HISTORY OF CROQUET: PART 8

CROQUET AND THE COSMOS

by David Graham

There has always been a degree of uncertainty surrounding how croquet developed independently in ancient cultures that had no known contact with each other, in particular its relationship with the deity. However, research into the game's origins has identified striking parallels between its symbolic relationship to the gods in different cultures and their understanding of the cosmos, notably in relation to planetary alignment.

We know that the layout of the croquet court symbolised the gateways to the seven levels of heaven represented by the five classical planets known in antiquity, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn, in addition to the sun and moon (see The Unofficial History of Croquet: Croquet Gazette - June 2024). However, research has also revealed that the orbit of the six known planets, which includes Earth, was studied by ancient civilisations and that their pattern of alignment was considered so important that megalithic structures, such as Stone Henge (Fig 1), were built specifically to measure a much wider range of astronomical relationships than previously thought.

The most significant of these is the alignment of the planets that occurs every twenty one years, known as the Krococ alignment, whereby the pattern replicates that of the six hoops orbiting around the sun, in the position of the centre peg (Fig 6). Earth is positioned at hoop two, while Venus occupies hoop five, which ancient cultures identified with fertility. The birth of Jesus, which determined the start of the modern calendar, is particularly significant for coinciding with the Krococ alignment, while twenty one is also the first number in the Fibonacci sequence that is divisible by seven and consequently was considered to be a magic number by the ancients. The next Krococ alignment will occur in 2037.

The Great Pyramid of Giza, in ancient Egypt (c. 2600 BC), was built over a period that spanned two cycles of the Krococ alignment. More recent studies using ground penetrating radar have revealed hitherto unknown chambers, whose entrances were blocked at the time of construction. The disposition of chambers and connecting passages has now been shown to be a three dimensional representation of a croquet court (Fig 2), with the King's chamber occupying the position of the centre peg and the Queen's chamber positioned at hoop five. We know that croquet was also played in ancient Mesopotamia and studies are now being conducted into whether the ziggurats had a similar pattern of chambers that replicated the layout of the croquet court.

The research has prompted archaeological investigations of pyramids constructed by other ancient civilisations, notably the Mayan pyramids of central America, with gateways arranged in the pattern of the six hoops (Fig 3). The ancient Burmese (Myanmar) culture in Bagan, where highly ornamented pyramidal shaped temples occupy a vast plain (Fig 4), is also the subject of studies, as are the Khmer temples at Angkor in Cambodia, where Angkor Wat is notable for its similarity to the layout of a croquet court (Fig 5).

These studies suggest that the layouts at Bagan not only determine the arrangement of chambers in the temples, but also dictate the relationship of the temples to their surrounding shrines, or stupas. The initial findings from these studies show a remarkable similarity between ancient cultures regarding the relationship of the layout of the croquet court to planetary alignment, which inevitably begs the question of whether some outside influence brought about the alignment of ideas in seemingly unconnected cultures.

This has prompted several theories concerning the possibility of Earth having been visited by aliens at the time that our ancient civilisations were building pyramids, and that croquet may have originally been played elsewhere in the universe. The idea, although fanciful, has sparked sufficient interest for astronomers to search the universe for solar systems with similar planetary alignments, raising interesting questions about whether, at some time in the future, intergalactic croquet will become a reality.

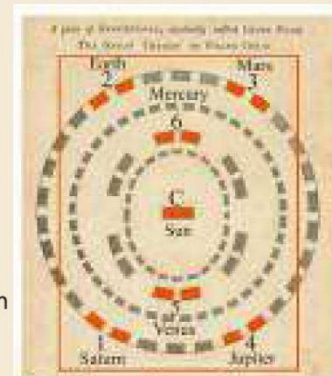


Fig 1. Stone Henge Plan

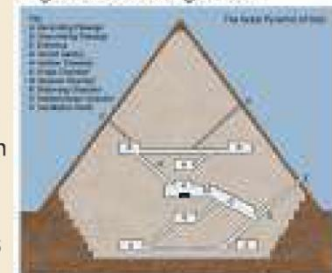


Fig 2. The Great Pyramid of Giza



Fig 3. Chichen Itza (Mayan)

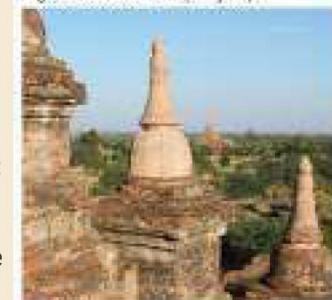


Fig 4. Bagan Temples and Stupas.



Fig 6. The Krococ Planetary Alignment



Fig 5. Angkor Wat: Section showing Centre Peg (C) and Hoop positions.



Saint Francis of Assisi - 1300 Giotto di Bondone

THE (UNOFFICIAL) HISTORY OF CROQUET: PART 9

CROQUET AND RELIGIOUS ICONOGRAPHY

by David Graham

There are many examples of croquet depicted in religious iconography, so it is not surprising that playing croquet is associated with vicarage lawns. However, the game's significance is often overlooked due to the controversy surrounding many of the translations of the gospels, often made several hundred years after they were written.

The earliest reference to croquet in the gospels relates to the occupation of Joseph of Nazareth, described as a carpenter, in particular a reference to his having a side-line making mallets. It was assumed that this referred to the wooden mallets used in carpentry, but a 10th century translation by Aldred in the Lindisfarne Gospels suggests that the actual side-line was making croquet mallets for the Roman nobility, who were avid croquet players. Aldred is known to have been a keen croquet player himself, which some scholars suggest may have influenced his interpretation. In fact, croquet was only played in monastic orders as a form of religious instruction prior to its wider introduction following the Norman Conquest, an idea which is supported by depictions of croquet playing saints in medieval illuminated manuscripts (Fig. 1). The croquet connection is reinforced by the number of religious relics in the medieval period that purported to be a sliver of wood from the mallets used by the saints.

The most famous depiction of a saint playing croquet is of Saint Francis of Assisi by Giotto di Bondone c. 1300, one of a series of frescoes in the Upper Church of the Basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi (Fig. 2). Saint Francis was a keen croquet player and used to feed the birds in order to stop them pecking at the hoop holes in the monastery lawn. However, Francis gave up croquet and retired to a hermitage once new rules were introduced giving novice monks with higher handicaps a hoop advantage, rather than extra turns.

A painting by the Spanish Baroque artist Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617-1682), entitled The Holy Family (c.1670), clearly shows Joseph making a croquet mallet, with several more stacked in the background (Fig. 3), suggesting the interpretation relating to croquet mallets was well established in the 17th century. However, Murillo is known to have been a croquet player and his painting may simply have been an allegory.

We know that croquet was exported by the Romans to their provinces, which included Judea and matches between rival clubs were hotly contested. The home match between Galilee and Bethlehem has been suggested as the location of the Feeding of the Five Thousand, at which an unusually large crowd of supporters had gathered, all expecting to be catered for by the home club. The scene is depicted in one of the panels in an obscure 17th century choir screen from the Netherlands, which has seven figures, including four holding mallets, but it is not known whether they represent the home or away team (Fig.5). The panel notably depicts six loaves and one fish, which is significant because it represents the six hoops and a peg in the game of croquet. The modern game is unlikely to attract an audience of five thousand spectators, which is just as well, given that it would be a challenge for most modern croquet clubs to provide the catering.

Pontius Pilate, governor of Judea, was himself a keen croquet player (Fig. 4) and is recorded as having played in an international croquet match between the Roman Republic and Judea, which Rome won and went on to become champions. However, no evidence exists to link the events for which he is most famous with croquet, despite some more recent conspiracy theories to the contrary.



Fig 5. C17th Choir Screen

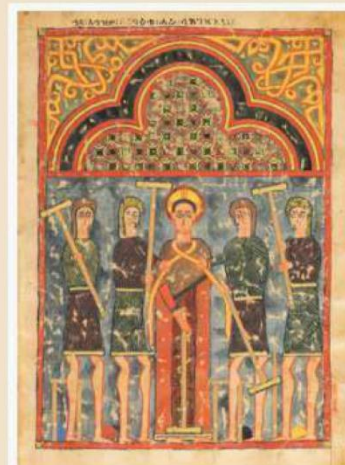


Fig. 1: Illuminated Gospel c. 1400



Fig. 2: Saint Francis - Giotto c.1300



Fig. 3: The Holy Family - Murillo 1670



Fig. 4: Pontius Pilate c. 36AD

The Holy Family - 1670 Bartolomé Esteban Murillo



THE (UNOFFICIAL) HISTORY OF CROQUET: PART 10

CROQUET AND SURREALISM

by David Graham

There are numerous examples of paintings depicting croquet being played in the Victorian and Edwardian periods, but the game's significance in surrealist art in the early 20th-century is generally overlooked. The reason why many of the most important modernist works of art depicting croquet are not better known is that they are rarely displayed in public galleries, but are hidden away in the private collections belonging to the wealthy international croquet playing set.

These works were often painted by the most famous of the modernist movement artists, many of whom were enthusiastic croquet players, and command prices in the millions whenever they come onto the market. However, perhaps the most interesting aspect of these paintings is not their value, but the insight they give into the artist's temperament, including their expressions of frustration with the game that the modern player can easily relate to.

The most famous of these painting is *The Croquet Player* - 1910 by Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), painted while on vacation in Cadaques, an example of Analytic cubism using monochrome and neutral colours, in which the mallet and hoops form a prominent part in the composition (Fig. 1). He was surrounded by a coterie of writers and poets who shared his passion for croquet, one of whom was André Breton, who often expressed the more surrealistic aspects of croquet in his poems, albeit using heavily disguised symbolism.

Perhaps the most evocative expression of the more negative aspects of playing croquet is portrayed in *Les joueurs de croquet* - 1954 by René Magritte (1898-1967), in which one player sits out while watching his opponent peg out at dusk, with a full moon and a flight of umbrellas drifting across the night sky. Magritte was not an accomplished croquet player and the rigid form of the seated figure exactly expresses his frustration with the game (Fig. 5).

Another artist who felt the need to express his frustration with the game was Edvard Munch (1863-1944). He painted several versions of *The Scream*, but perhaps the most poignant of these is one painted in 1905, depicting the reaction of a player who has just wired his ball by getting stuck in the hoop, a scene familiar to many players (Fig. 2). Munch struggled with his mental health, but the crucial part played by croquet in generating his feeling of emptiness and his increasingly impulsive behaviour has only recently been analysed, following the discovery of letters he wrote to friends complaining about the game.

Max Ernst (1891-1976), an obsessive croquet player, painted *Der Goldene Reifen* (French: *Le cereau doré*) in 1937, which must be one of the most vivid expressions of frustration at getting stuck in the golden hoop (Fig. 4).

Salvador Dali (1904-1989) was a more accomplished croquet player and his depictions of the game's frustrations were more humorous. The length of the game is brilliantly expressed in *El jugador de croquet* - 1931, which notably incorporates his melting clocks, an unconscious symbol of the relativity of space and time and the collapse of our notions of a fixed cosmic order, something many players will have contemplated while sitting out and watching their opponent run all of the hoops in a single break (Fig. 3).

The depictions of croquet in post-modernist pop-art tend to avoid the negative aspects of the game expressed by the surrealists, as in *The Croquet Player* - 1962, by Andy Warhol (1928-1987), a self-portrait of the artist playing croquet (Fig. 6).

The latest croquet artwork is by the street artist, Banksy, depicting a croquet playing monkey exercising a jump shot (Fig. 7), which mysteriously appeared on the pavilion at Ealing Croquet Club, along with a spate of other works by the artist across London. The identity of Banksy remains a mystery, but the indications are that he is a keen croquet player and may well be a member at one of the London clubs under another name.



Fig 1. Pablo Picasso 1910

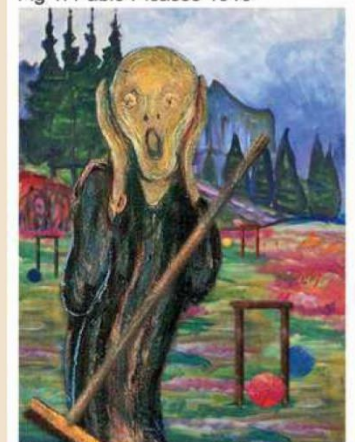


Fig 2. Edvard Munch 1905

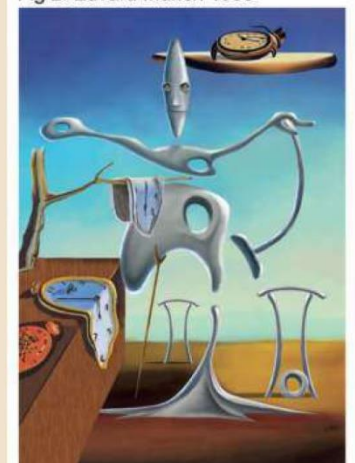


Fig 3. Salvador Dali 1931



Fig 7. Banksy 2024



Fig 6. Andy Warhol 1962



Fig 5. René Magritte 1954



Fig 4. Max Ernst 1937

The Croquet Player - 1910 Pablo Picasso



THE (UNOFFICIAL) HISTORY OF CROQUET: PART 11

CROQVET ET ELITISMVS

by David Graham

The image portrayed by croquet amongst the non-playing public is invariably one of elitism, due to its association with country houses, university quadrangles and vicarage lawns. This is hardly surprising, given that in early societies croquet was either played by the nobility or the priesthood. It was bowls that was played by the general populous, which explains why the game was synonymous with public parks in the Edwardian period.

It was the Romans, having adopted the game from ancient Greece, who promoted its exclusivity amongst the upper classes in Roman society, or patricians, while the plebeians were excluded. The most popular venue for playing croquet amongst the aristocracy was the Herculeum Club located on the banks of the Tiber. The site is the location of several archaeological digs, revealing a wealth of information about Roman society and the importance played by croquet amongst its leisured classes.

The Herculeum Club, named after Hercules in classical mythology, was set in extensive landscaped gardens, which included an ornamental lake, protected by a walled enclosure and raised promenade separating it from the river. The main building had a portico adorned with depictions of the gods playing croquet (Fig. 1), but the facilities also included baths, a swimming pool and grass courts for playing the ancient Greek version of tennis. The digs also uncovered stabling and parking for one hundred chariots, as many of the members travelled from their country villas that surrounded Rome.

The club rules were documented by Cicero (106 BC - 43 BC), who was a member, along with most of the Senate. The rules included a strict dress code requiring all players to wear white and even Cicero was censured for wearing an off-white toga. The Toga Candida was the standard set for most members, which involved it being rubbed with chalk to achieve a dazzling whiteness, but senators were allowed to keep their purple trimmings in recognition of their rank, resulting in the rule that togas should be predominantly white. The fashion for coloured trimmings was subsequently adopted by the national team.

Cicero commented that the whiteness of the togas even extended to the wildlife, so that only swans and white doves were tolerated within the grounds, with all other birds ending up as dishes in one of several restaurants at the club.

The club did allow female members, despite women fulfilling a secondary role in Roman society. There is one particular mosaic, discovered during an archaeological dig on the site of the bathhouse, which shows a couple arguing over how to play the ball in a game of mixed doubles, possibly a humorous reference to husbands partnering their wives (Fig. 2). Cicero also tells us that the divorce rate amongst married members was so high that couples were banned from partnering each other.

There are twelve Labours of Hercules in Roman mythology, representing the number of hoops in a twenty six point game, the most common format played by the Romans. The Roman Hercules is typically depicted holding a croquet mallet (Fig. 3), whereas it is Heracles of Greek legend who wields a club. The ninth labour involved a croquet match between Hercules and Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons, in which Hippolyta's belt was the prize. The Amazons were formidable croquet players and warriors (Fig. 4). They carried a leather tube, or quiver, containing croquet balls, which they hurled at their opponents with such ferocity that few got near enough to join in close combat, whereupon they were swiftly dispatched by a single blow from a mallet. The more accomplished female players at the club were therefore nicknamed Amazons.

The Herculeum Club was also the venue for the Roman World Championships, which were held each year to coincide with the return of the Consuls from the provinces that they represented, as most Consuls were also keen croquet players. It was observed by Cicero that a Senator could not be elected as a Consul without being a member of The Herculeum Club.

The club role of honour included some of the most famous figures in Roman history, one of which was Marcus Antonius (83 BC - 30 BC), commonly known in English as Mark Antony. He was captain of the national team when he first met Cleopatra (70 BC - 30 BC), queen of Ptolemaic Egypt, herself a keen croquet player, which cemented their relationship in later years. In fact, Egypt was Rome's greatest rival in international croquet and Cleopatra was given the status of an honorary member of the club.

The influence of The Herculeum Club on the history of croquet cannot be underestimated, but modern croquet clubs have now moved away from the elitism that it symbolised.

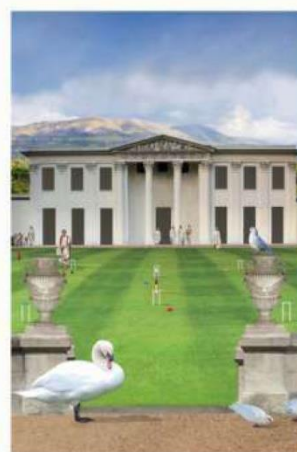


Fig. 1 Herculeum Club



Fig. 2 Mosaic

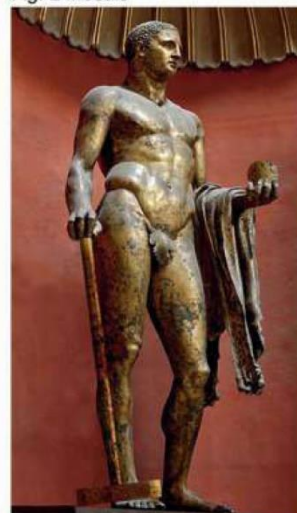


Fig. 3 Hercules



Fig. 4 Amazon



The Herculeum Club

THE (UNOFFICIAL) HISTORY OF CROQUET: PART 12

CROQUET AND THE WILD WEST

by David Graham

The late 19th century witnessed the rapid expansion of the North American frontier into what became known as the Wild West, but the part played by croquet is generally underreported.

This was partly due to the reduced levels of literacy amongst the frontiersmen, characterised by idiosyncratic variations in spelling and pronunciation, which included croquet being spelt as crocket, or even crocket, but still pronounced croquet. The terms used in the game by the frontiersmen also led to confusion when reported by journalists from the east writing about the Wild West. The mallet was referred to as a six-shooter, as it was used to run six hoops, which in turn led to the game being dubbed a gunfight in Wild West jargon.

The most notable example of confused reporting relates to a match played in Tombstone, Arizona in 1881 between the Earp brothers and Doc Holliday (Fig.1), on one side, and a team calling themselves the Cowboys on the other, which included the Clanton brothers. The Clantons were called outlaws in subsequent match reports, but the term was used at the time to describe players who had adopted a variation of the laws of croquet laid down by the game's governing body, which quickly became the norm in the Wild West, resulting in the nicknames outlaws and inlaws to describe the two factions.

The match was played at the Croket Corral, a corral being another name for a croquet court, and referred to as a gunfight (see above). Further confusion resulted from the fact that the name over the entrance to the corral had several letters missing, so that only the letters O and K remained. The match soon deteriorated into an argument over the rules, resulting in an actual gunfight, which is what was reported. This match was also the reason why referees were introduced into the game, although they carried side arms and violent outcomes to croquet matches were still a common occurrence.

Croquet was commonly played on dirt courts, often in back yards, which is why the dimensions of the court were called the yard line. The most famous image of the game being played in a back yard is of William H. Bonney (1859-1881), better known as Billy the Kid, photographed in 1878 (Fig.2).

Colonel David (Davy) Crockett (1786-1836) was the earliest of the frontiersmen to establish croquet in the Old West. His family name was originally Croquet, but was changed to disguise his paternal French origins. He became a legend for taking part in the siege of the Alamo Mission in San Antonio in 1836, which included a croquet court in its grounds, so that when ammunition for the cannons ran out, croquet balls were used instead. The reports of his death also described how he fought off his assailants wielding a croquet mallet (Fig.3).

George Armstrong Custer (1839-1876) was also a keen croquet player. The game was instrumental in his developing a tactic called the croquet formation, in which the cavalry advanced with outriders in the positions of hoops one to four, while the main body split into three groups equivalent to hoops five to six and the centre peg. This was meant to avoid being surprised, but the tactic went badly wrong at the Battle of the Little Bighorn. However, the irony was lost due to an incorrect spelling of Bighoop, which in the Lakota language meant a large bend in the river, with Little Bighoop describing a smaller bend.

William Frederick Cody (1846-1917), better known as Buffalo Bill, was probably croquet's greatest advocate in the Wild West and promoted the game in his Wild West shows. There was a sideshow in which contestants could pit their skills against Chief Sitting Ball, but the odds were stacked against them, as their balls were weighted so as not to travel in a straight line. Sitting Ball was also the term used to denote a ball nestling in the hoop.

Annie Oakley (1860-1926) was one of the key attractions in the shows (Fig.4) and would perform spectacular stunts in which she wielded a croquet mallet to hit balls through multiple hoops while simultaneously firing a rifle at balls catapulted into the air, similar to clay pigeon shooting.

However, popular as the game was, misreporting of The Gunfight at the Croket Corral was probably responsible for it not gaining the same status as baseball in the present-day USA.

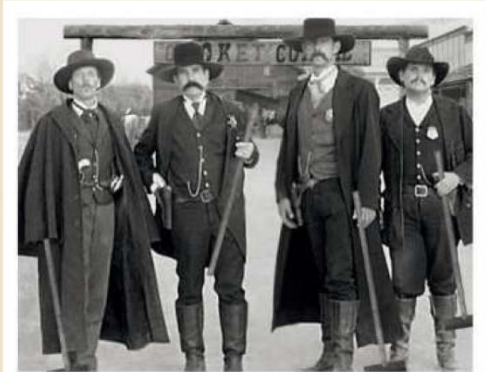


Fig. 1: Wyatt Earp - Croket Corral 1881



Fig. 2: Billy the Kid 1878



Fig. 3: Davy Crockett The Alamo 1836



Fig. 4: Annie Oakley Poster c.1889

BUFFALO BILL'S

and Congress of
ROUGH RIDERS
of the World

WILD WEST



MISS ANNIE OAKLEY THE PEERLESS
LADY'S JUMP-SHOT

THE (UNOFFICIAL) HISTORY OF CROQUET: PART 13

CROQUET AND PARADISE

by David Graham

There are numerous examples of doom paintings surviving in churches from the early Medieval period, but many of them have been overpainted as the political and religious climate changed, so that it is only after careful restoration that the significance played by croquet in the afterlife has been revealed. However, more surprising is the game's relationship to its more popular rival, bowls, and the part they played in scenes depicting purgatory.

It was bowls that was played by the common populous, whereas croquet was the preserve of the priesthood and nobility, so doom paintings generally placed croquet on the side of good, whilst bowls was seen as an instrument of the Devil and consequently playing it was banned on Sundays, a concept that was reinforced by each game's respective rules of play.

In croquet, hoops are run in a sequence that requires several changes in direction, and in the long version the direction is repeated in reverse, which was seen as a means to outwit the Devil, who can only travel in straight lines. This concept is common in many cultures in connection with evil spirits and is the reason why maze patterns were a popular feature in Medieval churches.

In bowls the balls, or woods, are rolled between parallel lines, and once that has been done, they are rolled back again, and so on, ad infinitum. There are no changes in direction to deter the Devil and the repetitive nature of the game was seen as representing a state of limbo similar to purgatory, which is why a weighted bias was introduced to make the balls travel in a curved path.

The most striking representation of this concept can be seen in the recently restored painting by the Italian Baroque artist Ludovico Carracci (1555-1619): *An Angel Frees the Souls of Purgatory* (Fig. 1), in which the angel can be seen lifting a croquet player towards heaven, while less fortunate souls clutching bowls are left behind, one of which discards his bowls into the flames in a desperate attempts to grab the mallet. A similar scene is played out in the *Wenhaston Doom* painted c.1480 (Fig. 2). The scales are held by an angel and weighted on one side with bowls placed there by a devil, while the penitents on the left who have been elevated to heaven are shown clutching croquet mallets. The term pegging out, a euphemism for dying, is also borrowed from croquet to signify reaching heaven.

The practice of overpainting was common throughout Europe during the Reformation in the 16th century. One notable example is *The Garden of Earthly Delights* by Hieronymus Bosch (1450-1516), in which the left hand panel originally depicted Adam and Eve playing croquet in the Garden of Eden (Fig. 3), with God giving his blessing to their union, which has also been interpreted as his acting as referee in matches played in the afterlife.

The changes made to scenes originally depicting croquet players ascending to heaven, while bowls players descend into hell, was most prevalent in England during The Commonwealth, as it was the Parliamentarians who played bowls, whilst the influence of the priesthood and croquet playing Royalists was in decline.

The relationship between croquet and the afterlife is further reinforced in the layout of gardens representing paradise, notably the Charbagh gardens that originated in Persia and the Paradise gardens that appeared throughout the Mughal Empire from the 16th Century onwards. Humayun's Tomb in Delhi, built in 1558, was the first garden tomb on the Indian subcontinent and is notable for incorporating the pattern of a croquet court in its layout, with water channels connecting six fountains representing the hoop positions, arranged geometrically around the tomb in the position of the centre peg (Fig. 4).

The orientation of the garden follows the compass points representing the boundaries in a croquet game, while the fountain at hoop one is enclosed in a pavilion, with the flow of the water channels following the order of the hoops. There is an ingenious mechanism whereby the flow can be reversed after the sixth hoop. In common with similar parterre gardens found throughout Medieval Europe, Paradise gardens replicated the sequence of hoops run in a game of croquet in order to throw off the Devil.

Our beliefs in relation to the afterlife have changed dramatically since Doom paintings were a common feature in churches, but it still might be prudent for non-players to take up croquet in order to err on the safe side.



Fig. 1: Ludovico Carracci



Fig. 2: Wenhaston Doom



Fig. 3: The Garden of Earthly Delights

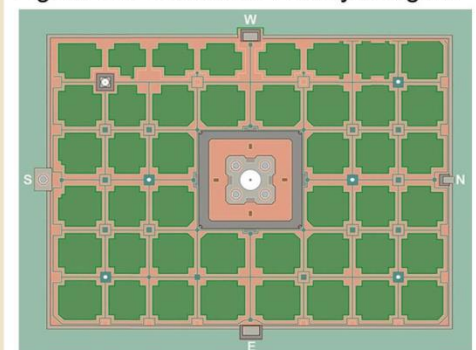


Fig. 4: Mughal Paradise Garden



An Angel Frees the Souls of Purgatory - Ludovico Carracci c. 1610

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