

**AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL ASSOCIATION  
CROQUET CHAMPIONSHIPS 2024  
REMARKS BY  
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC  
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA  
BALL ROOM, TUESDAY 12 MARCH 2024**

**VICE-REGAL SALUTE**

Good evening and a very warm welcome to Government House for this reception to mark the 74th Australian National Association Croquet Championships.

I begin by acknowledging the Muwinina people upon whose Country we gather, who flourished on Country as part of the South-East Nation of Aboriginal people. We honour them, and today's Tasmanian Aboriginal Community, as ongoing custodians of Country. I recognise their enduring culture and continued connection to land, sea, and waters.

May I firstly congratulate in advance your Australian Croquet Association (ACA) Board members, Events and Selection Committee members, and Tournament officials and committee members. You have all worked to put together a terrific program, that runs over nearly two weeks in Hobart, at five club venues.

Here at Government House, we have enjoyed working with your Tournament Organising Committee Chair, Ian Smith, and his colleagues, from the Eastern Shore Croquet Club. They organised introductory croquet sessions on our Government House croquet lawn for clients of Reclink Australia. This is a national charity improving physical health, mental health and greater social inclusion.<sup>1</sup>

May I share with you the story of why our croquet lawn is where it is. I hope it may interest you. In 1839, before this building had been constructed, the then Lieutenant-Governor of Van Diemen's Land, Sir John Franklin, was instructed to build an observatory to conduct magnetic observations, as there was a need to understand these magnetic characteristics and develop suitable geomagnetic

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<sup>1</sup> [Reclink | Strategic Plan](#), accessed 7 March 2024.

navigation instruments for our southern waters. This would make exploration and commercial shipping safer and more profitable.<sup>2</sup>

The croquet lawn site was chosen because it was on top of a thick sandstone bed. This ensured minimal metallic interference with the delicate magnetic instruments which had been brought out from England. The original wooden observatory building, in which the instruments were housed and operated, was on the exact levelled site of today's croquet lawn, close to the Quarry Pond. We don't know when that wooden building was demolished.

Fast forward to the year 1965 when then Tasmanian Governor, Sir Charles Gairdner, decided to convert the levelled observatory site to a croquet lawn. He was well-known as a versatile sportsman, playing tennis, hockey, polo and golf. And, no doubt, croquet, once the croquet lawn was established.

Sir Charles played all his many sports despite having sustained a serious wound to his right leg during World War One. Another of his remedial pastimes was knitting in front of the fireplace in the Drawing Room.<sup>3</sup>

Sir Charles Gairdner did not like to get out and about and preferred to be at home at Government House. Back in those days, when the Governor travelled, he always had a two-or-four Tasmania Police motorbike escort. One retired member of the Governor's escort crew<sup>4</sup> told my Official Secretary that after engagements in the north of the State, Sir Charles would enjoy driving himself back to Hobart. He would drive the Vice-Regal car, a Humber, and without the motorbike escort. Invariably, the motorbikes would be some way along the Midland Highway when Sir Charles would roar past, well over the speed limit!

May I conclude and wish you all a most enjoyable and memorable national tournament, including the Eire Cup.

Thank you.

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<sup>2</sup> *Government House Tasmania: A Remarkable Story*, page 44.

<sup>3</sup> recollected by Susanna Sitwell daughter of 1950s Governor Sir Ronald Cross, when she visited Government House in 2016

<sup>4</sup> I'm pretty certain it was Ian Dunkerley.