

History of SHA and Hockey in Sydney

Ancient History

Hockey was the first game played with a stick and ball. The first known reference is from the Persians around 2000 BC, and a Greek frieze from around 500 BC shows players in a very early version of a bully.



The game evolved through to the Irish game of Hurley and the Scottish game of Shinty in the 1800s. It was a recognised game early in the 1800s in England, but it was usually an all-in game rather than a team sport.

Hockey was not a common team sport until the second half of the 19th century. One theory is that it became popular as a winter sport for cricketers, although the first known hockey club was the Blackheath Football and Hockey Club in 1861. Rules were first set out in 1871¹, and were adopted for England in 1886. Hockey was recognised enough to be included in the 1890 “Handbook of Athletic Sports” by Ernest Bell, M.A. This book covered cricket, lawn tennis, tennis rackets, fives, golf, and hockey, which put it in elite company. Oxford and Cambridge even included hockey in their annual sporting competitions from 1890.

The name “hockey” comes from a French word for “crook”, reflecting the shape of early sticks.

Hockey Gets to Australia

Hockey was played extensively in the Royal Navy, arguably because ships’ decks made a suitable surface in port and at sea. The Royal Navy seems to have exported it to most British colonies. There are numerous references to games being played around Australia in the second half of the nineteenth century and the State Library of NSW has an etching of Hyde Park, Sydney in 1880 that shows hockey players near Lyon’s Terrace (near Liverpool Street).

Hockey was steadily becoming an organised team game in Australia, much as in England:

- The first known organised hockey match (rather than game) in Australia was in Port Gawler in South Australia on 17 June 1880;
- The first recorded school hockey game was also in South Australia, in 1896;
- In 1903 a girls’ school in Hunters Hill, advertised that it provided hockey² and former students even remembered its first games³;
- Navy teams played in Sydney in 1903;

¹ By London’s Teddington Club

² Cambridge Girls’ School in Hunters Hill had a team in 1903 – Sydney Morning Herald, 24 June 1908, p.5

³ SMH, 27 September 1934, p. 29S

History of SHA and Hockey in Sydney

- The attractions of Glebe Point on a Sunday morning in June 1904 were reported to be “several football matches, a hockey match, and a fight, also service at the Chinese Joss House”⁴; and
- School (and occasionally club) hockey teams were reported in New South Wales, South Australia, Western Australia and Victoria in 1904-05.

Sydney's First Hockey Clubs

Sydney's first hockey club was the Wandah Ladies Hockey Club⁵ from 1905.



Women's hockey teams playing at Manly in 1905.

In July 1905 Wandah had 45 members and fielded two teams⁶, which played at Birchgrove and Rushcutters Bay Ovals. Their opponents included a Navy team, a mixed team from Manly and a team of students (past and present) of Sydney Grammar School (SGS), which was predominantly made of players from Sydney University. Many games were mixed, even if some men complained that the women stopped the ball with their skirts⁷. This issue had obviously not arisen back in Greece.

A series of organised hockey games took place in Sydney in 1906. They were mostly for men's teams, but included matches with Wandah. The games were on Saturdays and were usually advertised in the Amusements section of the Sydney Morning Herald on Friday and Saturday. A well-publicised charity carnival in September 1905 even featured a mixed game.



Mixed hockey at a charity day at the SCG in 1905⁸

-
- 4 Evening News (Sydney), Mon 6 June 1904, p.2
 - 5 Sydney Mail, 19 July 1905, p.164
 - 6 Sydney Mail, 19 July 1905, p.164
 - 7 Sydney Mail, 19 July 1905, p.164
 - 8 Sydney Mail, 9 September 1905, p.632

History of SHA and Hockey in Sydney

A men's club called Corinthian was formed in late 1905 and is regarded as the first men's hockey club in Sydney⁹. Sydney University was also formed around then, and its first recorded game was in early 1906. The Sydney Mail of 20 June 1906 had a photo of Corinthians v Sydney University game, which is likely to be the first photo of any Sydney men's hockey team in action.



The June 1906 newspaper action photo of a Sydney University hockey game

The First Men's Hockey Association

In early 1907 Sydney's men's hockey clubs wanted to co-ordinate their games, as there were already eight clubs and 12 teams playing¹⁰, with more being formed. They met on 30 May 1907¹¹ and agreed to create the New South Wales Hockey Association.

The clubs playing during 1907 were Balmain (did not play after 1907), Bandits (did not play after 1922), Barbarians (did not play after 1912¹²), Corinthians (merged into Bohemians in 1922¹³, who then folded before the 1923 season), Navy/Fleet (left town after the 1912 season, because the Australian Navy was created in 1913), Hunters Hill (did not play after 1907), Sydneians (disbanded 1909: SGS Old Boys took the name in 1912¹⁴ but disbanded in 1922), Pilgrims (last played in 1922, but had a 2nd grade cup named for them in 1929) and Sydney University, which is the only original men's club still playing.

The clubs in the Association decided to follow the English principles of amateur athletics. Games like hockey were solely for pleasure, exercise and honour gained, and playing well was more important than being the winning team. Amateurism was a very important topic in 1907 – it split football in Sydney into Rugby League and Rugby Union later that same year. As a result many players, though, frequently played for multiple clubs in those early years.

From 1908 to 1910 the grounds used for hockey included Rushcutters Bay Oval, Sydney Cricket Ground No. 2, Gladesville, Crescent Oval (Cook's River, Marrickville), Luke's Park (Burwood), Imperial Oval (thought to be in Marrickville), Hawkesbury Agricultural College Oval, Chatswood, Waverley Oval and Victoria Barracks¹⁵.

9 Australian Town and Country Journal, 26 September 1906, p.51

10 SMH, 31 May 1907, p.10

11 SMH, 31 May 1907, p.10

12 SMH, 7 May 1913, p.5

13 The Arrow (Sydney), 12 May 1922, p.9

14 Referee (Sydney), 18 September, 1912 p. 8, and The Sydneian No. CCXI, April 1912, p.27

15 See eg The Referee (Sydney), 6 April 1910, p.11

History of SHA and Hockey in Sydney

Issues mentioned in the match reports for the men's hockey games through 1907 and 1908 included grounds, games starting late, too little stick skills¹⁶, lack of umpires, potential need to pay umpires, lack of teamwork and the need for a dedicated hockey ground. In 1909 they also noted that a Veterans team would be formed because:

"(the game) is now played too strenuously for those men who are not as young as they were, and who through pressure of business and other reasons are unable to train regularly. It is expected that this club will afford such men an afternoon's amusement without about four days' stiffness and discomfort"¹⁷.

The Sydney Masters competition clearly has a long history, as have the issues facing players of every era.

The First Women's Hockey Association

Six women's teams appear to have played in an informal competition in Sydney in 1907. They were Cambridge School, Coeeyanna, Kumalong, Manly, Valkyrie and Wandah¹⁸. These teams and four others formed a separate NSW Ladies' Hockey Association on 26 March 1908¹⁹. The four clubs that joined them for that inaugural meeting were Bedford College, Fortians (presumably Fort Street Girls High School students, past and present), Strathfield and Sydney University²⁰.

Most of the women's founding clubs lasted less than a decade. Bedford College played only in 1908 and 1909. Cambridge School played in 1908 and possibly 1909, Coeeyanna and Fortians played only until 1915, when many clubs were waning as men enlisted and people focused on the War effort. Kumalong and Strathfield played only in 1908, Manly only until 1910 and Valkyrie last played in 1921. Wandah was short of members in 1919²¹ and did not field a team again. Sydney University is the only original women's club still playing.

The NSW Ladies' Hockey Association changed its name to the NSW Women's Hockey Association in July 1910, but remained otherwise unchanged until absorbed into Hockey New South Wales in 2004. It was aware of the breadth of its responsibilities, though, and as early as 1925 it talked of creating a separate Metropolitan Women's Hockey Association to manage the game in Sydney.

Creation of Sydney Hockey Association

In 1929 the NSWHA – the organising body for men's hockey - began its first major restructure. Country clubs had grown and it was decided to separate management of the metropolitan and regional competitions. This led to the creation of the Metropolitan Hockey Association (MHA) in 1929, while a body still called "New South Wales Hockey Association" was put in place to oversee the sport across the State. The bodies were closely connected. In 1931. Mr EG Foskett was elected president of both, as well as simultaneously being president of the Australian Hockey Association and the Hockey Umpires Association²².

The MHA started as a very active sporting body. It even entered a cricket team in the 1929/1930 Sydney competition²³.

Teams playing in the MHA matches between 1927 and 1929 included City, *Cremorne-North Sydney*, Cumberland, Eastwood, *Eastern Suburbs*, Gordon, Kensington, Manly, Mascot,

16 The Arrow (Sydney), 4 April 1908, p.11

17 The Referee (Sydney) 4 Aug 1909 p.12

18 Hodges, Lena and Dive, Mollie "NSW Women's Hockey 1908-1983" (1984), p. 6

19 Hodges, Lena and Dive, Mollie "NSW Women's Hockey 1908-1983" (1984), p. 6

20 There is a photo of the Sydney University women's team from 1908 in Osmond, Barbara "Tradition and Transformations: A Tribute to NSW Women in Hockey" (1984)

21 Evening News (Sydney), 14 May 1919, p.2

22 The Referee, 8 April 1931 p. 15

23 SMH, 26 September 1929, p. 15

History of SHA and Hockey in Sydney

Middle Harbour, Mosman, Newtown, *Northern Districts*, *Randwick*, *St George*, *Sydney University*, Teachers College, United Services, Waverley, *Western Suburbs* and Woollahra. Some teams had taken appearances: infrequently mentioned teams in the Sydney competition are Goulburn Joy Club, South West Districts and, in 1929, Holy Cross College, Ryde. Clubs in italics are still playing today, although sometimes as amalgamations.

This was before the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, and travelling distances and expenses were an issue for teams travelling from or to the north. In 1931 the formation of a further body, the Northern Suburbs Hockey Association (NSHA), was considered in order to run a separate and more accessible north-of-the-harbour competition for non-elite teams.

This association was created in early 1932 for grades other than "A" grade. Clubs fielding teams in its competitions included Gordon, Eastwood, Shirley, Cheltenham, Cremorne-North Sydney, Artillery, Manly, Epping, Mosman, Beecroft and Dee Why²⁴. One assumes this was done with the full support and co-operation of the MHA: the same Mr EG Foskett became patron of the NSHA when it was formed, along with his other roles.

In the 1930s Sydney was perhaps Australia's major hockey venue. There were a number of visits by men's and women's teams from overseas (including England, India and NZ) and tests were played around Sydney. There was no dedicated hockey field, so these games were played at the SCG or places such as the Square at Sydney University, and usually attracted significant crowds.



Rep Hockey in the 1930

The MHA ran an active competition until the war, and a much reduced one during the war. It then continued until 1951. In 1949 the MHA had 1000 players registered with it, while the NSHA had 500. That total is greater than the number of men playing in Sydney even today, 2015.

It appears that the operation of two separate competitions had become too much by 1951. In late 1951 MHA was wound up, (and NSHA apparently too), so that in early 1952 a new

²⁴ Eg SMH, 14 May 1934, p. 15

History of SHA and Hockey in Sydney

association called "Sydney Hockey Association" (SHA) could be formed to take over the player registration and competition management roles of both MHA and NSHA.

The new SHA decided to recognise 15 district clubs in Sydney, and they were required to field at least a first, second, and third grade teams. Those initial clubs were: Canterbury Bankstown, *Cremorne-North Sydney*, Cumberland, *Eastern Suburbs*, *Glebe*, *Gordon*, *Manly-Warringah*, *Moorebank Liverpool*, Mosman, *Northern District*, *Randwick*, *Ryde Hunter's Hill*, *St George*, *Sydney University* and *Western Suburbs*²⁵. The 12 clubs in italics are still playing in 2015, although sometimes with further amalgamations.

Nine of those 12 club names had existed when Sydney hockey was restructured in 1929, although only one of them had been there when it was initially structured in 1907. Those nine club names were all still in existence when the third major change took place in 2015.

SHA as a single-purpose competition manager

SHA continued to run the men's competition in Sydney until 2014. At the end of 2014, for the third time in its history, the structure of men's hockey in Sydney was changed again as part of a State-wide initiative.

By 2014 there were approximately 13 women's associations and just one men's associations running hockey across Sydney. They were all members of Hockey NSW (HNSW), the single body formed in 2004 by the merger of the State's peak men's and women's associations. This Sydney structure was at odds with the national directive that all sporting associations (including hockey) which relied on Government funding should be integrated. The multiple women's associations and the single men's association (ie SHA) across Sydney were therefore restructured as six separate geographic associations covering both men and women. This was mostly done by the creation of new entities, so the old entities such as SHA continued as legal entities, but were no longer members of HNSW. The players formerly registered with them were also now registered with one of the six Sydney associations.

In 2015 SHA therefore began a new life solely as a competition manager for a Sydney-wide men's competition, with teams entered from clubs in the various new geographic associations.

The clubs fielding teams in 2015 – some 110 years after hockey matches started in Sydney - were Briars, Bentstix, Eastern Suburbs, Glebe, Gordon-North Sydney, Manly, Macquarie Uni, Monterey, Moorebank Liverpool, North West Strikers, Ryde Hunters Hill, Sydney University, St George-Randwick, Sutherland, Uni of NSW, UTS and Wests. They provide one of Sydney's great sporting traditions because many of these clubs have been playing against each other for close to 80 years, and some clubs are already over 100 years old.

*Rowan Johnston, with Brett Radcliffe and Anne Simmons
April 2015*

²⁵ SMH, 31 Jan 1952, p. 7