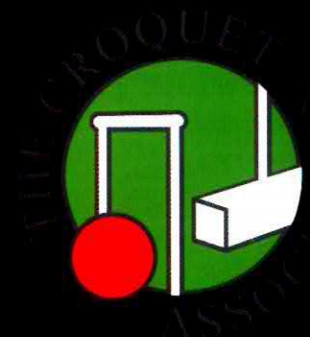


the croquet gazette



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CA's new Cheltenham office completed

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advertising

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specific questions and queries

Specific questions or queries should be sent direct to the Editor. Email contributions, including tournament reports, should be sent direct to the Editor, or copied to the Editor if they are being posted to the Nottingham List.

Both black and white or colour prints of photographs can be used. Slides are no longer accepted. Photocopies of pictures or print-outs of digital images cannot be used. If using digital photography please send in jpeg or tif format files. Resolution of scanned images must be at least 300 dpi. Please detail on the reverse of all photos the subject of the picture, and, if you require the photographs to be returned, please include your address on the reverse.

tournament results and reports

Emailed reports are welcomed. Attachments may be sent in Microsoft Word format, or any other PC-based word processor. Hand written reports are no longer accepted.

delivery queries

Queries regarding delivery of the Gazette to members should be directed to the Secretary of the Croquet Association and not to the Editor.

disclaimer

The opinions expressed in the Croquet Gazette are those of the editor and contributors. The Croquet Association is not responsible from statements other than those clearly defined as being made on behalf of the Croquet Association.

the croquet gazette

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Cover photographs of Cheltenham Croquet Club and the new CA Office by Dave Kibble and James Hawkins

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the president's appeal

You may not be surprised to read that the CA's plans for developing the game are currently in limbo. Our committees are geared up to help member clubs (large and small) as we have been doing in recent years, but many of the new opportunities need funding. And there lies the problem. We have had to commit more than £50,000 from our reserves to pay for the new office at Cheltenham which does leave a rather large hole. All our 60-or-so volunteers who serve on the CA's Council and committees are keeping their fingers crossed that the appeal for donations by our President, John Solomon, will be successful. John is writing to all Associate Members about now, asking for their help. Please don't leave it to others.

that survey again

Kevin Carter from the Marketing Committee recently presented the results of the survey of croquet players to the chairmen of our relevant committees. Much of the information is going to help us generate more recruitment aids for clubs (watch out for more about this in the next few months). But it is also helping us understand more about the profiles of Associate Members and those players who are not yet members of the CA. The survey results have intrigued many readers and I picked out just a few nuggets that we shall be following up. Croquet players:

- are a lot more computer literate than the general population. This suggests that the CA's website will become an important communication channel for us rather sooner than we anticipated (70% of you use computers, 60% are emailers and 75% of our web surfers visit the CA website).

- are avid readers of the Daily and Sunday Telegraph (PR opportunities for us?).

- introduce a lot of friends and relations to croquet ✓ but most of them



do not take to the game.

- are very greatly influenced to take up the game because of the proximity of a local club.

Our really good players typically took up the game as young men. They are competitive and regard croquet as an intellectual challenge. They play snooker, billiards or pool and how can I put it? - they tend not to be home-ly, family people. If we want to continue with a winning MacRobertson team we know where to look for future recruits.

Dare we think we know why women are not as good at croquet as men? Only 4% are below the age of 50, and that does matter if you want to excel. Their reasons for taking up the game are typically 'to meet interesting people', 'fresh air' and 'sociability'. Absolutely valid reasons for playing, I hasten to add. But typical male reasons are 'competitive instinct', 'desire to improve' etc. I think I should move on to safer ground before I am accused of ageism, sexism and probably other isms I haven't caught up with yet.

Non-Associates generally don't know the benefits of becoming Associate Members of the CA. Or if they do, they are not convinced by them. The Marketing Committee has already started to provide some additional incentives, starting with what I am assured are good value wine offers (we now know how many of you enjoy a glass or two!).

Cheers, and I hope to see many of you at the AGM on 12th October.

Quiller

CA news

The CA Wine Society

One of the Marketing Committee's aims for 2002 has been to improve the package of benefits available to CA members. We have spent the summer negotiating with various bodies and have decided that the best place to

start would be with our very own wine society.

The reasons behind our thinking are that in the recent CA membership survey 83% of the respondents indicated that they liked a good glass of wine. With that extremely high response rate it seemed like a good place to start.

The Folio Wine Society has offered us a good deal where both the members and the CA will benefit from the various offers being made. The opening offers are detailed in the leaflet enclosed with this issue of the Gazette.

The deal for members offers some very good value for money wines delivered direct to your door. Many of the offers will be flexible in nature. For instance *The Croquet Association's Classic Case* will offer a choice of 12 wines which you can pick in any combination you desire. The price will be £45 per dozen delivered to your home.

Our in-house "experts" have described the Classic Case as "a good selection of every day drinking wines at a very fair price". There are two Royal Warrant Wines in the selection and the writer can personally comment on the Claret which he found to be a well rounded, soft fruity wine suited to most occasions. The range of Chilean wines were found to be particularly good value for money and certainly worth a try.

For the more discerning wine drinker we have put together a special case called the *Croquet Association Supreme Case*. This case has met with critical acclaim from independent wine critics and is strongly recommended. The 2 wines from the Fruili area of Italy are worthy of special mention - try them and see for yourself!

All you have to do is complete the Order Form then send or fax it to Folio Direct. Alternatively you can phone them and discuss your proposed purchase with them direct. Their staff will be more than pleased to give you whatever help you may need.

The second offering will be published in good time for Christmas and will include an opportunity for you to be able to arrange for Christmas Gifts to be sent direct to the recipient of your choice, providing they live in the UK.

The CA will receive a small commission on all sales and this money will be used to invest in projects to further improve our game, including initiatives at club level.

If we find enough interest in the Wine Society we can then consider expanding our benefits package further. We already have a proposal for various types of insurance: this can be implemented at fairly short notice.

The Wine Society is only open to Tournament and Non Tournament Members living in the UK. In your club there many people who are not members of the CA. Perhaps a good drop of wine will encourage them to join!

John Isaacs
Chairman Marketing Committee

Solomon Trophy

The Solomon Trophy is contested between Great Britain and USA, this year 8-12 October at the, National Croquet Centre, Florida. The final team is:

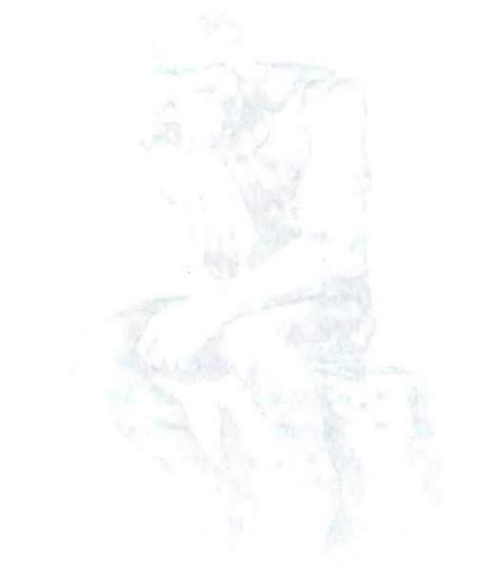
Mark Avery
Matt Burrow
Phil Cordingley
Jeff Dawson
Colin Irwin
David Openshaw (Capt.)

The Think Tank

Since forming the Think Tank (*Croquet Gazette*, May 2002), four Associates have submitted ideas to improve aspects of CA activities. Thank you for your contributions, outlined below. I now hope more Associates will feel encouraged to add items to this list.

Brian Fisk's (Littleton CC) suggestions included coaching courses, training for referees and handicappers, and

aspects of the handicapping system. He felt there could be more publicity about the County organisation of the sport, to promote the Inter-Counties championship.



Rev Canon Gervaise Markham in Penrith referred to recruiting, particularly of youngsters. He suggested Pirates as the best form of croquet for an all-age party in the garden and a good way to introduce young people to croquet. Are there any other forms of fun-croquet which you play at your club social events or recruiting drives?

Brian James of Bere Regis in Dorset proposed increasing membership by linking clubs with their local branch of U3A (University of the Third Age) to organise croquet training courses, advertising these in local U3A literature. [I believe many clubs are doing or considering this.] He suggested this could be done during the winter months, when members may have more free time, using the CA minims available in their area. He also proposed that we try liaising with SAGA, maybe organising 'special interest' croquet holidays with the co-operation of a local club.

Dan Windham of Wymondham in Norfolk suggests a limit be placed on the number of roquets allowed in each turn, to increase the 'out' player's time spent on the court. He believes this could lead to more adventurous play

and more 'leaves' and 'beginning of turns', which are the interesting bits.

All these ideas have been presented to the relevant committee chairmen for comment and reply. Please do keep the Think Tank in mind whenever you have an idea for improvement on the existing situation. Contact me via the address details on Page 2.

Bryan Judson
Chairman Management Committee

South African Fixtures 2003

Andy Knox Snowbird Tournament: After a great 2002 tournament which was won by Louis Nel from Ottawa, Canada, the 2003 tournament will take place on 11th & 12th March at Rondebosch Croquet club. As with last year the first 12 confirmed entries will be entered. We will, once again be taking everyone out on the town on the 13th & 14th.

Western Province Croquet Tournament: The 2002 tournament drew the likes of the World Champion Reg Bamford who brought along Mark Avery to savour the delights of Cape Town. Needless to say Reg won the singles with Mark the runner-up. Due to World Cup Cricket matches which are to be held in Cape Town next year, we have moved the tournament by a week and moved the Golf Croquet to run after the Association Croquet. The 2003 tournament will be played from 15th to 22nd March with the Champagne Farewell on Sunday 23rd, followed by the Golf Croquet Tournament from 24th to 27th or the 28th, depending on the number of entries.

Entry forms for the above tournaments can be obtained from:
Carole Knox, 29 Suffolk Road, Lakeside, 7945 South Africa or on email caroleknox@freemail.absa.co.za

Preferential rates at the Holiday Inn are available, so early confirmation is invited for 2003.

using the half-bisque

Dear Editor,

We would like an authentic view on a situation that arose in a recent match, which has exercised us!

The opponent decided to take his half-bisque. He roqueted and croqueted, and then - forgetting it was a half-bisque - aimed for his next hoop in order. The ball jammed in the hoop, half way through. This was a lawful shot, but of course would not have scored had it gone completely through.

The question arose, if our player ignored that ball where it had come to rest, and joined up with his partner ball, could the opponent at his next turn complete the running of the hoop and score it without having to go back out again first?

This was important, since, if so, it might have paid our player to take a shot at it; but, if not, the opponent could do little useful except come out of the hoop (no wiring lift being available, as he'd placed the ball there himself).

We would be grateful for the expert's opinion, since we could not find it in the rules.

Michael Haslam
York

It sounds like everyone's behaved correctly here. The half-bisque cannot be used for scoring any point for any ball: this means that the striker can't complete the running of a hoop with a half-bisque, though it's perfectly allowable to start a hoop by landing in the jaws. Law 14 deals with matters related to hoop points, and the definition of scoring is given at the start, in 14a(1). As this allows the striker to complete the running on his next turn, it's often worthwhile for the rival player to attempt to dislodge the jawed ball.

In the above scenario, had the half-bisque belonged to the other player, it could have

been used now to send the jawed ball through the hoop, but denying any score being registered for the opponent. - Ed.

back to basics

Dear Editor,

Diana Brothers, in her letter in July's Gazette, mentioned the reluctance of those who begin with golf croquet to try Association. It was always assumed that players would "obviously" want to move from golf to Association. One reason that more should choose to stay where they are is down to the CA's praiseworthy efforts to make more of golf croquet - more events, more publicity, rule books, guides and so on. Golf croquet players feel they now have a properly recognised and organised game of their own, so why change?

Now a club like Sussex County, with experts in both disciplines, is well able to provide coaching for anyone who wants to learn the Association game, regardless of which version he or she started with. But what of those small clubs, perhaps recently founded, who are endeavouring to establish themselves with a few members on a corner of a cricket pitch, wanting to play Association but with no experienced player to explain things?

It is not uncommon for the rules of play at such clubs to be laid down, often erroneously, by an individual who holds some sway within the club for one reason or another, a situation even more prevalent among the game when played on a home court. I have lost count of the times I have heard someone say (for example): "You mean you don't lose a turn when your ball goes off? Well, so-and-so told us....." If the CA wants to encourage Association croquet, be it at the biggest club or in the smallest garden, it must be able to offer a simple official guide that can be used easily by individuals and new clubs to answer all those frequently asked questions. The only official publication currently on offer, other than a leaflet, is the Blue Book,

which is like handing someone who just wants to play a tune a treatise on orchestration.

There used to be such a guide - the Basic Laws of Croquet. It is much missed, and I have lost count of the number of times I have made copies of it and sold them on to grateful recipients. I am not the only person to have done so. Now January's Gazette mentioned that the Basic Laws is to be resuscitated, and indeed the patient may be off the trolley and in theatre by now. On behalf of all those who look forward to its reappearance, can I express my wishes for a speedy recovery from the operation and the opportunity of seeing it alive, well and adequately cloned in time for the new season. The CA might also like to consider the opportunity of arranging with the various manufacturers for a copy to be included with every croquet set sold, which would alert people taking up the game to the presence of the official body and eliminate much of the arguments and frustrated incomprehension that still exist.

John Bevington
Secretary, Wrest Park CC

I'm glad to have confirmation that a new edition of the Basic Laws is needed. An updated version of the old one is in draft and I hope it will appear in time for next season. The delay is down to me: knocking balls around is a bit of a distraction during the summer!

Ian Vincent
Chairman, CA Laws Committee.

television be damned

Dear Editor,

I read the articles by Michael Wilson and James Hawkins (Gazette, July 2002) with great interest. The gods preserve us from the pernicious influences of the television cameras on the, as yet, untarnished reputation of competition croquet. The pollution of the noble sports of Athletics, Rugby Union

and Lawn Tennis, by the destructive commercialism and banality of the TV world should be warning enough. The prevailing belief that the prime qualification for celebrity status is frequent repetitive and tedious appearance on the small screen is an unfortunate indictment of modern values.

No; resist this lemming-like trend at all cost. As a long-term sports enthusiast, but relatively recent convert to the intriguing challenge of Association Croquet, I believe the essential need for the game's future prosperity is to provide a more structured outlet for the competitive spirit.

Personally, I would like to see the evolution of regular league competitions, fashioned perhaps along the lines of the amateur cricket scene. The management of such leagues would need to be much more comprehensive than at present, based on well-defined National guidelines, leagues would enhance pre-planned programmes of 'home' and 'away' fixtures, with end-of-season promotions and relegations.

The profile of the sport would be raised profoundly through the local publicity generated by match reports and regular publication of league tables. New players surely would be attracted and expertise increased by the experience of frequent competition. Leagues of 12 to 14 clubs would ensure this.

Members of clubs wishing to play Croquet simply for its undoubted and traditional social attributes would continue to do so through the existing system of inter-club 'friendlies' and other domestic events. The essential stately nature of the sport need not be besmirched. Teams involved in the leagues would of course be of mixed gender. In particular, however, those players who thrive on a diet of frequent vigorous competition would be given ample opportunity for this within their chosen sport of Association Croquet. I feel sure that increased interest in the sport would follow.

Ian Burn
Rother Valley CC, West Sussex

I can't speak for the rest of the country, but the North West has always had an active handicap league. More recent introductions have brought Golf, Short and Advanced Play to the inter-club scene. An excellent source of local publicity as well as a means for players to experience croquet at other clubs. - Ed.

croquet and disability

Dear Editor,


I read with great interest the article in the May issue of the Gazette, entitled 'Croquet and disability' as I am a disabled player. My disability is my legs and I now play using a flat bottom stick, which I sling over my shoulder (whilst actu-

ally playing) in the same way an archer would sling a bow over his shoulder. I play in inter club Tournaments and have won two of them. My current handicap is 16. My husband also plays and has a handicap of 12. He has asked me to play in CA Tournaments with him, but there is one thing stopping me from doing this. The CA Tournaments held at our Club (Ramsgate Croquet Club) play three full games on the first day and two on the second day. It would be impossible for me to play three full games on one day because of my disability. I know other members of the Club feel that three games is too much for them, due in their case, I believe, to age and not disability.

I have played croquet for the past fourteen years and thoroughly enjoy it. I believe disabled players should be encouraged to play, and no doubt there are some who already do. Would it be possible to hold a doubles Tournament where the partnerships consist of one able bodied player and one disabled player and restricting the number of games played in a day?

Linda Mockett
Ramsgate

I'm all for it, provided enough people will join in. Any clubs around the country care to get involved? - Ed.



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Len Hawkins

Ramsgate Croquet Club is still recovering from the sudden loss on March 17th of their president, Len Hawkins. His untimely death at the age of 71 has brought home to members just how hard he worked for the Club in particular and for Croquet in general. He served as our treasurer for 18 years (as well as being treasurer of a local badminton club and the army ski-bobbers) - a task which grew more complex as our members grew and we became a self-governing body.



Len retired from the army with the rank of major, having served in many far-flung outposts including Northern Ireland and Germany, to devote more time to badminton, tennis and croquet. The improved facilities at the club were due to a large extent to his dedication and hard work. He led the various working parties where skills learned with R.E.M.E. were put to good use. His energy was prodigious despite a triple heart by-pass in 1991. He was organiser, referee, senior coach, line marker, trolley maker etc etc and the proud possessor of the C.A. Diploma for services to the club. His enthusiasm was inspirational. He was always willing to pass on his skills to members and was rarely absent from the weekly coaching sessions. His keenness to bring croquet to a wider audience was well known - he could often be found explaining the finer points of the game to interested passers-by. He also supported the innovation of school-days at Ramsgate and encouraged local groups and societies to come and try the game. A move which proved extremely popular and has led to new members for the club.

He was a strong supporter of golf croquet, believing it to be the best way to introduce basic skills without the pressure of learning complicated tactics. He played in the World Golf Croquet Championships in Egypt. This year he was a referee at the championships in Florida and was so highly regarded that he was asked to officiate for the final. Sadly his health precluded his acceptance of the honour.

He was a regular visitor to Parkstone Club for their July tournament and as our representative to S.E.C.F. was well known in this area. He also gained a reputation as a correspondent to the Gazette. His frequent letters covered a range of topics from the desirability of wearing 'whites' to the perceived disadvantage of having a round bottom (to his mallet). For Len nothing was too much trouble and despite being sorely tried on occasion found some redeeming feature in everyone. His willingness to help and his unflinching good humour hid most of the seriousness of his heart problems and his passing leaves a void which will be difficult if not impossible to fill.

Ian Price

John Finnerty

The members of Llanfairfechan & North Wales were very shocked to hear of John's death on June 7th as the result of a tragic accident whilst he was walking on Tryfan in Snowdonia.

A quiet, easy-going and unassuming gentleman, John was an enthusiastic croquet player who enjoyed the game which he first took up whilst a teenager in Frodsham in his friend's garden and continued whilst studying both as an undergraduate and postgraduate student at Cambridge.

His enthusiasm for the game led him to become a Club Level Coach so that he could share the skills that he had learned with other members of our club. As well as being a thoughtful, solid and hard-working Chairman for the last 3 years, he had been Captain of the Short Croquet Team for 5 years, and had become an expert at coaxing members to take part in tournaments and league matches in the North West Federation. He frequently led his team to play at Fylde, Bury, Bowdon, Lancaster, Culcheth, Crake Valley, Chester, and the Pendle and Southport Clubs where he particularly enjoyed playing and had many friends.

He developed his interest in computers when he had a temporary job during the months after passing his Cambridge entrance examinations and the start of the next University Academic Year. Although he held a B.A. in Natural Sciences, after graduating he went back to his compelling interest in programming computers.

He chose to live in North Wales because of his love of walking the mountains - especially Tryfan, which was his favourite.

Whilst his stepdaughter Katie learned Welsh at Primary School, John and his wife Wendy learned Welsh at night classes. He brought his family to live in Llanfairfechan in 1991 and John soon discovered the croquet lawns. In 1992 he started to work with NRG Surveys of Llanfairfechan as a programmer and was held in high regard. The family returned to live in Llithfaen on the Llyn Peninsula about 6 years ago.

John wished to have a woodland burial, and this was held at Westhope near Craven Arms. There will be an apple tree planted on his grave in the autumn.

He will be sadly missed by his friends at the Llanfairfechan & North Wales Croquet Club and all his friends in croquet.

Georgina Llewellyn

Alan Burn

Tyneside Croquet Club is mourning the passing of the second of its Twin Towers. Just under one year after the death of his great pal Brian Kennedy, Alan Burn has died from a heart attack whilst driving in Tynemouth, luckily doing no damage to his wife who was in the car with him at the time. Alan had to retire from competitive croquet a couple of

years ago, but during his playing career was part of Tyneside's Longman Cup winning team in 1995, and, with Brian, was a keen socialiser and player in weekend events. He won the "double" of advanced and handicap cups at Tyneside in 1995, and repeated the advanced win in 1997. His last few years were enhanced by the arrival of twin grandchildren, but marred by increasing ill-health, which prevented his travels in the UK with Brian, but which did not curtail his friendly manner and sense of humour.

Alan and Brian taught each other croquet at Tyneside's University playing field, starting 15 years ago, and playing each other over and over, in what they called "The Streetlight Championship". Once both had retired they started to play the circuit, both in England and Scotland, and both represented Tyneside and Croquet North in team events. Most recently, Alan was a "Senior" winner in one of the regular Croquet North "High-Low" Progressive Doubles events, where the "Junior" player scores two points for each hoop, and therefore has to be encouraged around the court, Alan's easy manner being most conducive to that kind of coaching and encouragement.

With the loss of both of these characters, the quality of playing (and off-court) life in Tyneside, Croquet North, and all the tournaments they have graced with their presence, will be lessened. Their memories will live on.

Bruce Rannie

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tournament round-up

national veterans championship

Budleigh Salterton, 17-22 June 2002

report by Senex Maximus



Ken Smith, who won the Rothwell Cup for the second time

The Veterans Tournament this year was noteworthy for a variety of reasons. The number of applications and the number of people actually playing were both the largest on record; there were more minus players competing than in any previous year; in the five Class events there were two 4-way and one 3-way tie; and last and perhaps not least, the current Chairman and Secretary of the CA each managed to win a trophy.

The Rothwell Challenge Cup (for the Championship itself) was retained by the holder, Ken Smith of Winchester, but only by the very narrowest of margins in a 4-way tie over Bill Arliss (Sussex C.C.), the runner-up, Martin Granger Brown (Bowdon) and Michael Rangeley (Cheltenham). In the B class event, for the handsome Felixstowe Cup, Richard Hoskyns of Hurlingham managed, in a criss-cross play-off, to beat not only the winner of the second block but also to defeat

Nigel Gardner (Dunfermline) who had beaten him into second place in the first block. In the third of the Class events, the Chairman of Council, Quiller Barrett, emerged from a 3-way tie to win the Strickland Cup, with Derek Trotman, Chairman of the CA Tournament Committee, in second place.

The Over 70s Championship was won (without a tie or other complications) by Richard Wainman of Cheltenham, with his fellow club member Bo Harris as runner-up. The Over 70s Handicap Singles had of course to produce a 4-way tie, with Ian Birdseye of Budleigh coming a very close first.

Time did not permit play-offs in any of the multi-tie events, each of which was resolved on a "Quality of Wins" basis (as the Manager had said they would before the tournament started); this used a formula under which the winner is the player in the tie who has the

highest tally of victories gained by the beaten opponents.

The other two events, the Unrestricted Handicap Singles and the Doubles were completed (no doubt to the Manager's relief!) without any of the complications encountered in the Class events. In the former, X, Y and Z were all completed, the winners being Nigel Graves, the CA Secretary (Caterham), who thus won the Meredith Cup, Doug Taylor (Kenilworth) and John Gosney (Sussex C.C.).

In the main Doubles event for the Longman Trophies (the Sussex Trugs) the winners were Bill and Pam Arliss (Sussex), the runners-up being Hamish Hall (Bristol) and Diana Brothers (Sussex). The consolation Y (for the Gilbert Spoons) was won by Geoff Cuttle (Woking) and Tom Frost (Crawley).

It would be nice to report that the weather was brilliant and the lawns of the highest order, but it can be said without fear of contradiction that the spirit of the Veterans remains undiminished and, as always, unique.



"WHERE DID YOU SAY THIS TEAM WERE FROM?"

ladies events : barlow & longman bowls

Cheltenham, 15 - 18 August 2002

Report by Gabrielle Higgins & Penny Crowe

Because of a dearth of ladies putting themselves forward for selection, the Barlow and Longman bowls were played as sixes instead of eights. The "twelve odd" ladies, as someone kindly described us, soon decided that the best collective noun for us was a coven of croquet players. The aptness of this was certainly shown in the Barlow Bowl. Alison Thursfield seemed to control electro-magnetic hoops from her chair to ensure Sue Edwards crashed into ass much wirework as conceivably possible, while Gabrielle Higgins had a nice line in "bouncing bombs", which bounded merrily down a pitted and sloping East boundary to hit two successive lifts!

Sarah Burrow's victory in the Barlow Bowl was never in doubt, with nine out of ten wins. She now has the pleasure of seeing her name on the trophy after three years of being the runner-up. Kathleen Priestley and Frances Ransom, the joint runners-up, were presented with the Silver Mallet Brooch.

In the Longman Bowl, the grand plan of playing three games a day for three days and a single game on Sunday was bedevilled, as on the first day only two rounds were played with one game pegged down overnight. As a penalty, play started on subsequent days at 9 a.m., but after two more pegged down games and twilight croquet on Day 2 we suffered the ignominy of time limits ever after.

After all these vicissitudes, Gene Mears carried off the trophy, having won eight of her ten games. Marian Hilton had to wait for the result of Gene's and Penny Crowe's pegged down game to see whether she was the outright runner-up or whether she had to share the position. In the event Penny beat Gene and shared the pleasure with Marian of becoming joint runner-up.

The trophies were presented by Bo Harris, a former holder of both the Barlow and Longman Bowls.

Ladies Week was a most enjoyable experience both on and off the courts. The play was challenging, followed by a great social life - all most agreeable. So, come on girls, apply next year to get the event back to full strength.

Thanks must be expressed to Ray Ransom for his quiet and unassuming managerial style, to Dab Wheeler for fantastic catering, to Eileen Magee for engineering our social treats and to Cheltenham Croquet Club for providing the venue.

Results (wins out of ten & position):

Barlow Bowl

Sarah Burrow	9/10	1
Kathleen Priestley	6/10	2=
Frances Ransom	6/10	2=
Gabrielle Higgins	4/10	4
Sue Edwards	4/10	5
Alison Thursfield	1/10	6

Longman Bowl

Gene Mears	8/10	1
Penny Crowe	6/10	2=
Marian Hilton	6/10	2=
Eileen Magee	5/10	4
Jane Babbage	3/10	5
Diana Williamson	2/10	6



Players in the Barlow (top) and Longman Bowls

golf croquet opens

Budleigh Salterton, 13-16 June 2002



Richard Brand marks a position for his brother Ivor in the Golf Open Doubles Championship

Reg Bamford won the Golf Croquet Open Championship beating Ivor Brand 2-1 in the final and fulfilling his ambition to win £500 from Stephen Mulliner.

Mulliner and Bamford each put up prize money for the event, giving a total fund of £1,000. As it transpired, Bamford's phenomenal shooting proved too much for each of his opponents at the block stage. In the play-offs he dropped just two games, one to each of John Moore and Ivor Brand, both very much on-form in a strong event.

In the Open Doubles final, Chris & Roddy Sheen beat the home team of Roger Bowen & Tony Bower 8-7.

Quarter Finals

Chris Sheen beat Cliff Jones 7-5 7-4
Reg Bamford beat John Moore 7-2 4-7 7-1
Ivor Brand beat Derek Old 7-4 2-7 7-5
Evan Newell beat Bill Arliss 7-6 7-2

Semi Finals

Reg Bamford beat Chris Sheen 7-4 7-3
Ivor Brand beat Evan Newell 7-4 4-7 7-2

Final

Reg Bamford beat Ivor Brand 7-4 4-7 7-2

lawns? James Hawkins finds the solution in Bowdon

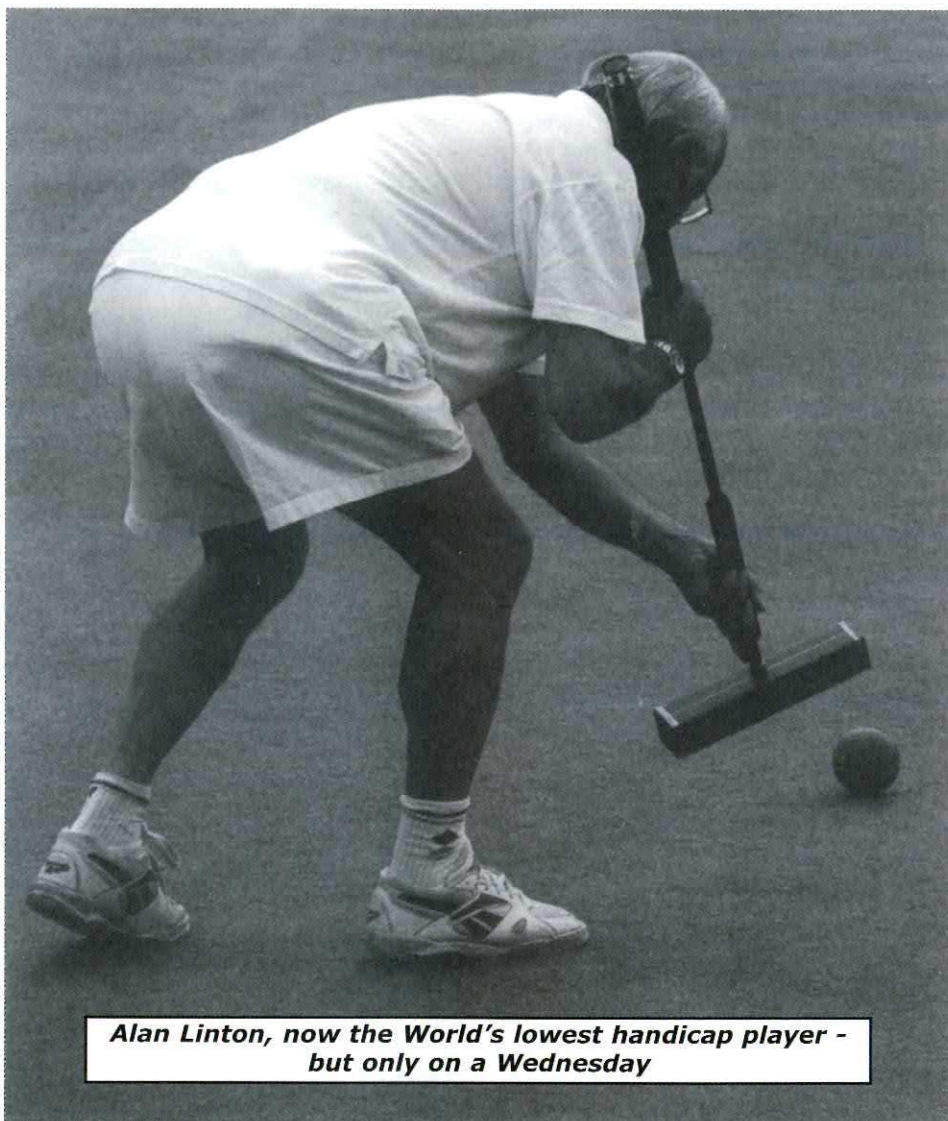
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Alan Linton, now the World's lowest handicap player - but only on a Wednesday

tor, is widowed each week by his golfing wife. Turn up at the golf club on a Tuesday morning, and you're bound to get a game against whoever's there. So why does croquet have no equivalent?

Every Wednesday during the last four seasons members have turned up for the weekly competition. Originally it was just four of them. The week before I went (the Wednesday when the Commonwealth Games just across town flooded), there were eleven. That four of them stayed for the whole day is testament to the hardiness of Mancunians. The highest turnout ever is an impressive 23. Yes, it's a bigger

Proceedings start at 9.30 each week, when arrivals put their 50p entry in the kitty. This money is pooled throughout the season until Wild Wednesday, the first meeting in August, when organisers blow the accumulated funds on free booze for all players. Knowing a cushy journalistic assignment when I see one, I sped down the M56 to Bowdon.

I made it promptly, ready for the starting pistol. Players sign a list in order of arrival, and pair up according to a predetermined draw. So, whether there are six or 20 people, their games for the day can be just read off from the numbered table in the clubhouse. I

down the path. And after another five minutes, I found myself co-opted to the list as Number 18, club mallet in hand, on a hastily laid out short croquet lawn.

The format for the day is this. With an even number, everyone can get three shortened games in the day, and there's a winner by teatime. An odd number forces one player to sit out, so a fourth round is introduced. Bowdon hits its maximum capacity with three full sized courts, and Lawn 4 divided for Short Croquet. At a squeeze, that permits 20 people to double-bank. Any more and a secondary doubles event comes into force.

Each round consists of a 14-point full-bisque handicap game. Bisque allocations are reduced as per the standard tables in the Laws. Time limits are set to 90 minutes, though as far as I could see, there seemed to be fairly lax policing of this rule.

That seems to be the essence of the event. John Saxby's original intention was to create a totally managerless system. Time limits seem to be agreed as "Let's see how we're doing at coffee time, then stop if it's raining." This certainly breeds a healthier spirit than can be witnessed in many tournaments. Perhaps managers of calendar fixtures would do well to heed this for future events.

The scoring system is the most radical and slightly arcane aspect of the Wednesday competition. Game winners each receive a 20 point bonus, which they add to the point difference from their game. Losers on the other hand receive one point for each hoop they score. So, a 14-0 win would be reported as 34-0, and 14-13 becomes 21-13.

My first round match against Number 17, Jenny Dennis, left us with four clips on the net. Jenny's in her first season

newcomers and the experienced, in a low-pressure setting. Call it a non-competitive competition, or a means of practising together. Or just a group social occasion. Whatever it is, the likes of Jenny have about the highest playing standard of any beginners you'll see anywhere.

Narrowly, I won my first game, and picked up my 20 point bonus. It was now that I noticed the table of handicaps. This is one more strange aspect to the scoring system for the Wednesday competition.

Whoever wins the event receives a handicap cut of one bisque for all future meetings - for ever. Perhaps it's an overly competitive attitude to the event, but Alan Linton came to his first Wednesday as a -0.5, and has since won an impressive four times. By now, with a midweek handicap of -4.5, his continued success seems implausible, but he keeps on coming, and keeps picking up wins.

John Saxby is obviously proud of the handicapping system. "Sooner or later everyone's going to have their turn at winning. Even Pam." In fact, this looked like being Pam's day, as she notched up a speedy 34-0 against Colin Wild. (I think, though, from the on-court flurry of spectator referees, that it was her first ever peg-out.)

By lunchtime we all had our first two rounds complete, and with a 16-way tie for second place, there was all to play for. Out with the packed lunches, and back on the lawns for the decider.

The scoring system, if you want to analyse it, is surprisingly subtle. A bad win or a good loss can wipe you out or bring you back into the running for the winner's laurels. But not today. Only Keith James mustered three wins, racking up a total of 75 points. The crowds were disappointed not to see Pam taking her first title and hav-



A tray of Buck's Fizz provides little distraction for Colin Wild

nothing more than a Mars Bar. Now the winner receives not only the Mars Bar, but also the sense of communal pride in cutting it into 18 pieces and sharing it with his fellow competitors.

This is the one thing that sums up the Wednesday competition like nothing else. Nobody cries and goes home disappointed. People turn up in their droves, and they do it for fun. There's a buzz among the players and a real sense of unity within the club.

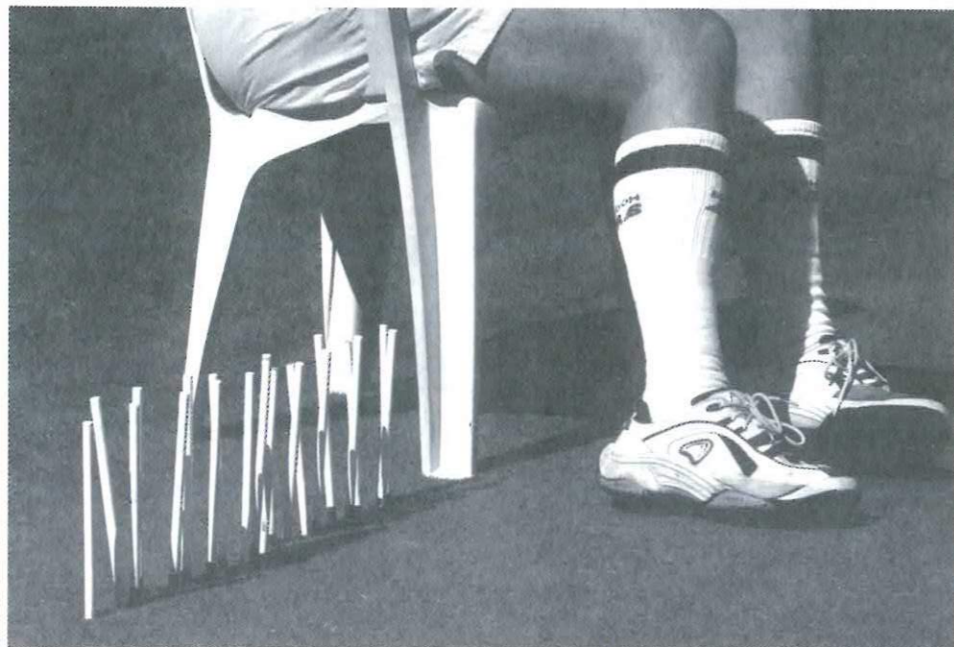
There's no doubt at all that pretty much everyone there is playing better than they were four years ago, and I'd hazard a guess that the Wednesday competition is largely responsible for that too.

It's teatime when Keith gets round to the cutting of the Mars Bar. This being Wild Wednesday, there are extra trophies to hand out. Like many events at Bowdon, these come from former racing driver and Wednesday stalwart, Colin Wild. Keith gets a tankard. John Leckie gets the booby prize of a ninth-mounted elastic motor car. I

beware - bi-polar croquet is on the way!

does the handicap system itself drive away B-class players?

Report by David Mooney



Over the last two or three years the number of entries to handicap tournaments from players handicapped below 6 is dropping off dramatically. Why should this be?

The Automatic Handicap System is supposed to give all players an equal chance of winning games, and hence tournaments. I've played golf (not golf croquet) for more years than I have played croquet and I've seen the two handicap systems in action. It is quite noticeable that the balance of people winning in the two games is quite different. The majority of golf games played to handicap conditions are won by players of lower handicap. For croquet, the reverse seems to be true.

Since September last year I have been asking B-class players (handicaps 1 to 6) if they compete in handicap tournaments on a regular basis. The most common reason given by those who don't is that they feel that they do not have a fair chance of winning games and will lose matches when they shouldn't.

Let's look at the maths. Imagine a club, Much Hooping, with only two members, Brian and Charlie. They both have (accurate) handicaps of 5, and only play each other, winning half

their games. The handicap system, at Much Hooping Croquet Club at least, remains in equilibrium.

A new member, Anne Improver, joins the club. She is a 24, and the three play each other, each still winning 50%. Anne goes on a coaching course, and comes back much improved. Her win rate is now consistently above 50%, and the club's system is thrown out of equilibrium.

Brian's success rate, for the time being, remains the same as Charlie's. Each will win 50% of their games against a fairly handicapped opponent. Brian plays a lot against Anne, though, whose win rate is abnormally high. For every ten games they play, Brian's handicap index will suffer depending on Anne's performance. In the worst case, Anne will win every game, and Brian's index will shed 100 points, making him a 7.

Anne's win rate	Brian's game results		Brian's net handicap change
	won	lost	
50%	5	5	0
60%	4	6	-20
70%	3	7	-40
80%	2	8	-60
90%	1	9	-80
100%	0	10	-100

Enough exposure to an incorrectly handicapped player runs the danger not only of providing an unfulfilling game for Brian, but also leaving him with a handicap which is seriously adrift.

The reasons

So, B-class players are feeling hard done by, and finding handicap games unfair. What are the reasons for the alleged unfairness? Their most commonly cited reason is an opponent playing off the wrong handicap. This isn't necessarily what players call banditry; there are a quite a number of reasons for a player's win rate to drop below 50%.

Maybe the opponent is a bandit (a rapid improver). Maybe, though, the opponent is just having an exceptionally good day's play. He could be an inconsistent player and his handicap represents the average standard of his ability. He might have a lot of practice games not on his card, and not reflected in a change of handicap. And if it's his first tournament, his provisional handicap may be wrong.

As for the lower handicapped player, his win rate may be down because he's playing badly himself, and cannot see it. Perhaps he's not adjusted his game to suit handicap play - two players of the same ability may perform differently at either handicap or level play, depending on which format suits them better.

Many players have noticed a regional discrepancy in the handicap scale. This is to be expected, as different regions - or individual clubs - are like-

-ly to arrive at their own state of equilibrium, whether or not players travel outside that region.

Perhaps the most worrying factor in many players view of an unfair game is the possibility of running out of time in a timed game against a very slow opponent.

Whatever the reason given, the increasing number of new B-level competitions for disaffected players shows that something is wrong.

The effects

Why should we be worried about this problem? B-class players represent a small proportion of the tournament playing population. Most tournaments now have a waiting list, and the tournament entry will not be unduly affected by their absence.

If the drop-off continues the handicap system will become a bi-polar system, with a group of players playing in handicap tournaments and the rest playing level advanced. With the exception of week tournaments, the two groups will meet less and less. This will mean that it will become increasingly difficult to move between the groups - the handicap 5 who's risen through the ranks of handicap play will struggle to compete against a current established 5.

The division will make it difficult for improving players to experience playing against the better players. Most players improve by watching better players and incorporating their skills and tactics. This effect will be most noticeable at the smaller clubs where there are few high-class players. The effect of the division will be cumulative.

Less exposure to the higher class of player will exaggerate the difference between the two groups, as handicap points are only exchanged within each self-contained group. This will also

lead in turn to increasingly wrong handicaps at the edge of the two groups, with the better handicap players meeting only worse players than themselves.

When people do start to play in level events they will find the standard too great to make the transition between the groups and this could cause the loss of aspiring players, finding progress harder and harder.

The solutions

What can we do to alleviate the situation? Here are some suggestions:

Handicappers

Some club handicappers appear not to be doing their job. We need more CA handicappers. In time, every club should have its own CA handicapper, qualified via a CA-run course.

At tournaments

All new players, or those having been out of the game for an appreciable period, should be required to be watched by a CA handicapper before their first CA Book competition. Tournament managers should check all cards at the start of tournaments, and sign them at the end.

Handicappers should punitively cut players who are obviously playing off the wrong handicap in a CA tournament (an excessive-sounding suggestion perhaps - though at my first tournament, the handicapper cut three players three times each during the course of the week). There should be a mandatory cut of one handicap step for the winner of a tournament, in addition to any natural change. Changes made by a handicapper should be irreversible, at least for a three month period.

The CA should run national handicap ratings as they do for level play recording victories and number of bisques standing.

At clubs

Clubs should take responsibility for the actions of players deliberately playing off the wrong handicap (this is cheating!). All club internal competitions must appear on cards, along with all doubles matches at a fixed value of 5 points.

In general play

Many players use bisques destructively for wasting time, instead of using them positively for break building. Managers should employ Wharrad turns instead of time limits, or disallow the use of bisques in the last 45 minutes of a timed game.

The laws could be changed so that bisques cannot be used after the first stroke of any turn i.e. they cannot be used for a missed hit in.

In conclusion

In most sports, the player who plays the best wins. In a handicap event that should be the player who plays above his standard. I can think of no sport where the players of lesser ability are favoured, other than timed handicap croquet tournaments. I personally am still playing handicap tournaments at the handicap of 4 and will continue to do so. Where tournaments continue to use time limits, many of my games will be lost on time.

Time limits are a management tool to ensure a result, not an requisite of the laws. Where possible no time limit games are preferable. For many players with single-figure handicaps it is the imposition of time limits which drives them away from handicap play.

The Handicap system is the cornerstone of Association Croquet. Most competitive games are played to handicap rules, and it is a system which allows a world champion to play an 18 handicapper. But how do we cater for those B-level players who are caught in the divide between top class advanced events and handicap play?

shouting from the rooftops

Pat Francis has taken on the new role of Public Relations Officer for the CA. James Hawkins asked her about the daunting task ahead.

JH: I'm bound to start off by welcoming you to the post. But why does croquet need someone as a Public Relations Officer?

PF: If you look at the results of the CA Survey, many people raised the issue of croquet's image problem. The game is often marginalised and not seen as a serious competitive sport by the media. What's more, most of the casual players who play in the garden don't know there's an organisation and infrastructure administering the sport nationally.

Secondly, my background at Sport England should help us get Croquet more widely appreciated in the sporting mainstream.

JH: What led you into Sport England, and what does that mean for your new role?

PF: Well, I started off with a degree in sociology and spent five years as a social worker. I had children and returned to work as a library assistant. I knew I couldn't spend my whole life stamping books in a public library, so took a postgraduate degree in librarianship. With that I found myself as Regional Information Officer for Sport England in Birmingham. After eight years I went to London in 1998, and spent two years as Information Manager at Sport England's head office.

JH: What did that involve?

PF: It couldn't be much further from public library work. I was the project leader of the team co-ordinating the production of ten regional directories to a corporate template. This information subsequently formed a national database. It's the basis of the Sports Gateway on Sport England's website. My other role was managing the publication distribution contract. Sport England produces a wide range of information, I had to make sure it got to the right people at the right time.



There's a lot of marketing in getting across a message. What I'll be doing for the CA will be a progression from that.

JH: What about your croquet experience?

PF: I started playing four years ago. My husband plays. I wasn't exactly dragged kicking and screaming, but my motivation was really just to find out what he found so compelling. Now it's started to click and I'm completely hooked.

To me croquet is about competing against yourself and improving your performance. I think it has a tremendous amount to offer. A key message

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'We'll never be able to work effectively at PR without knowing the audience we plan to reach, and the message we want to put across.'
”

to get across is about health and fitness. It's a game of social inclusion: relatively cheap to play and not all the clubs are in the leafy suburbs!

We'll never be as popular as football or cricket, but I think croquet has a similar image to bowls, and that gets a reasonable amount of coverage.

JH: What are your plans for the job?

PF: It's going to be a steep learning curve, finding out about the background to the game, and pinpointing people I need to contact. I've a strong grounding in how sport is organised, and so want to improve our relationship with sporting bodies. My past experiences should allow me to network and get involved with all sorts of useful people.

As for the job, I'm setting myself three objectives. Firstly, I need to find the stories: see what's out there and feed press releases to the papers who'll use them.

Secondly, croquet needs to improve its relationship with the media. It's September now, and I only officially started on the 1st. Most of this season's events have been held already, so I've got to plan which events to use next year.

My third objective is to work on a development plan for the game. We have nothing in place, and I'll be helping draw it up. We'll never be able to work effectively at PR without knowing the audience we plan to reach, and the message we want to put across.

JH: Is this going to be a national effort, or are you going to be working with individual clubs?

PF: I'm sure there are lots of people at clubs with local knowledge and expertise. They don't need me telling them what to do, but I hope to draw a lot from what they do already. Many clubs, I know, have their own Publicity

Officers, and I plan to contact them to get examples of good practice for promoting the game. Maybe that involves their work with disabled players, or the recruitment of youngsters, ethnic minorities or women.

JH: The Marketing Committee made the initiative a couple of years ago of forming a partnership with the children's charity, ChildLine. We held fundraising events for them, in return for any publicity. Is that a project you'd want to repeat?

PF: Working with charities is important. Getting involved with national initiatives should enhance our image. If there's a repeat of the recent Sports Relief, we should look very closely at doing something. Croquet should be seen to be part of the sporting scene and not perceived as separate.

JH: Yes, but how would you get clubs to support a specific charity?

PF: Not all clubs will be able to support a specific charity. However, those who wish to be involved will hear of the initiatives through the *Gazette*, which I think should be a major means of communicating with the CA membership. As for setting up a partnership, there has to be a certain fit between the image we want to portray and what a charity would wish to achieve. If we want to show croquet as a game for - say - active retired people, it's a good idea to team up with a charity whose supporters or beneficiaries match the same profile.

JH: You mention the *Gazette*. Is your role going to cover public relations between the CA and its members as well as with the outside world?

PF: Thinking about who my main client is, it's difficult to differentiate between the CA specifically and croquet in general. The CA wants to encourage new members, who may be in clubs but haven't yet joined the

Association. I'll be working with the Marketing Committee on this.

There's been an ethos that the CA exists mostly for tournament players. As a beginner myself, it's not easy to get into the tournament scene. My husband, Peter, plays regularly and has taken me along with him, which has given me a valuable insight. Having advice and encouragement from a more experienced player is a great help.

Starting at a small club, I wasn't aware of the wider role of the CA. After "persuasion" by the CA Secretary to join Surbiton I gained a much greater perspective on the game and the organisation. Having just moved to the Cotswolds, we are now playing at Cheltenham.

However, I still think we need to keep sight of what's happening at the smaller clubs who are the grass-roots of croquet.

“
'I still think we need to keep sight of what's happening at the smaller clubs who are the grass-roots of croquet.'
”

JH: Talking so far, I think we've been concentrating on the press: newspapers and magazines. Do you plan to focus much on radio and television?

PF: Television is a possibility. Not necessarily for televising the game, but for getting across a message. In London, much of the local news still revolves around the capital and national events. It's much easier in the

rest of the country, where there's more room for local community-based stories.

JH: Up here, I think the North West fares very badly too, when both BBC and Granada have a news service based largely around Manchester.

PF: Yes, and I think Birmingham tends to dominate West Midlands coverage. It seems to be a general problem with metropolitan areas. Here, though, both HTV and the BBC's Points West seem quite open to local news.

Radio is promising - there are so many local radio stations now. Some will definitely be interested. It must be carefully planned and locally targeted. No-one will respond to a broadcast covering a club that's 30 miles away.

JH: So what's the next step?

PF: I'll be sending out press releases for the remaining events this season. I'll be trying to get next year's events and fixtures into national calendars for the media. And, I'll be planning and building some sort of network of press officers at clubs throughout the country. That should lead to an ongoing programme of PR activity.

There's not much point in writing lengthy articles right now, when most of us won't be playing again until next March or April. The first story of the year is likely to be the move from Hurlingham to Cheltenham, and the official opening of the CA Office at Cheltenham at the start of next season.

JH: Pat, it sounds a formidable challenge. I'm sure we all wish you the best of luck.

PF: Thank you. I'm looking forward to working with everyone to benefit croquet and the CA.

New croquet exhibit at AELTCC Museum, Wimbledon

The new Omega croquet hoop is probably the only significant hoop innovation since Ayres introduced the Davidson hoop (still used at most clubs today) in 1899. One was presented to the Museum of Lawn Tennis and Croquet, at the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club at Wimbledon. The AELTCC Museum is the UK focus of croquet history and has a peerless collection of croquet artefacts and memorabilia.

The Omega hoop was conceived by Cheltenham Croquet Club member Tal Golesworthy. A Chartered Engineer, Tal has been playing croquet for some 16 years at Cheltenham.

The clearance between the hoop and

the ball affects the ease with which the hoop can be run; the rules of Croquet specify fixed tolerances on hoop settings accordingly. In practice, it is difficult to set conventional hoops to the CA regulations.

The Omega hoop allows precise adjustment without removing the hoop from the ground. This eases the workload involved in setting the six hoops on a lawn, and solves the problem of poorly set hoops.

The Omega hoop is in production, and is in use at eight clubs in the UK and Europe, including Cheltenham, Wimbledon, Bristol, Roehampton, Geneva, Parsons Green and Hurlingham.

Ramsgate Junior Tournament

Mary Currie and Roy Ware of Ramsgate Croquet Club have worked hard over the past 18 months on developing the club's Junior Section, and this hard work is definitely proving a winner.

There are now 16 boys and girls in ages from 8 to 13 attending coaching on Saturday mornings, plus some extras who are not so regular. They play Golf Croquet, One Ball and

Association. Six of the boys have taken part in the club's Handicap Golf Singles, with James Provins winning all the games in his block and, at the time of writing, is progressing through the knockout stages.

On the 30th August the second Junior Tournament was held, with 16 players playing Golf Croquet in four blocks and then a knockout stage. The blocks went as predicted with Scott Alder,

he Omega hoop is manufactured by EDT Ltd, and sold exclusively through the Croquet Association shop in the UK.



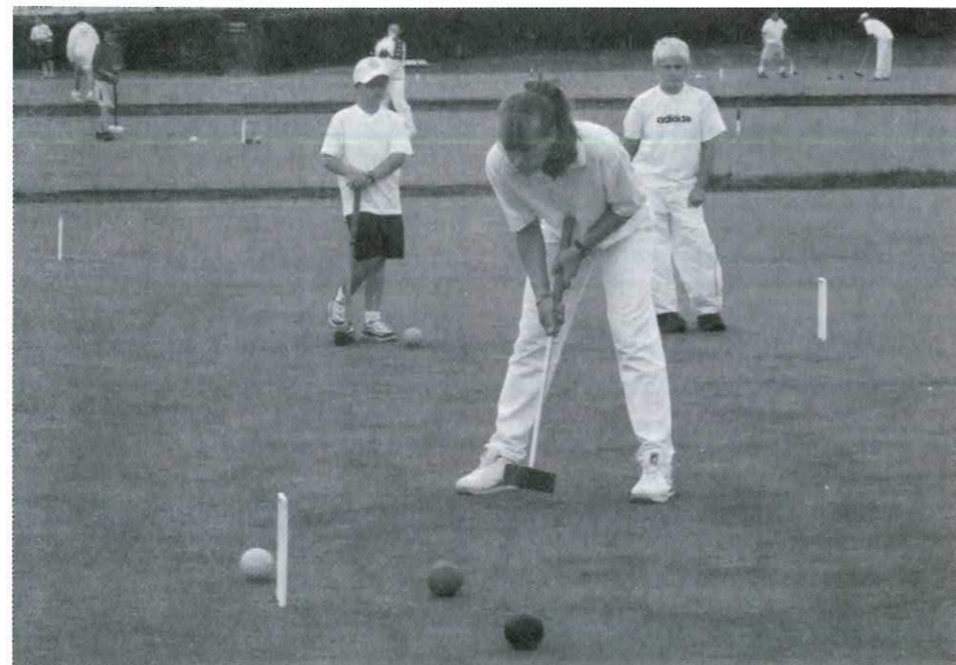
James Provins, Darren McMaster and Ricki Savage winning. Last year's winner James Goodbun again played well and reached the quarter-finals.

The surprise of the tournament was Lloyd Stickles, who reached the semi-final, even though he had been playing for only six weeks, before being defeated by Scott Adler. He was awarded a medal for being the most improved player.

The final was played as best of three between James Provins and Scott Adler. The games were very strongly contested, with both players determined to win. The players' styles are very different, with James being the more stylish. There were many good shots played by both players, but the best was a jump shot by Provins to make one-back in the second game, and put pressure on his opponent.

The eventual winner was James Provins, 7-5 & 7-5. The result has brought his handicap down to 4, and Scott Adler is down to a 5.

Coaching will continue during the winter, when it is hoped that more will also take up Association.

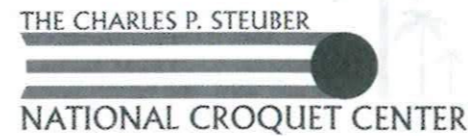


dreaming of the sun ...

Kevin Carter reports on moves to promote croquet in Florida

Are you like me when it gets to January, February? It's cold and wet and we cannot wait for croquet to get going again. We dream of the sun, of wielding our mallets again under a blue sky.

If you would like to know more see the advertisement or contact us for more information. I am on 0118-971-2948 or kevin@profundus.com; Nicky is on 01825-740262 or nicky.evans@diplomatic.co.uk.



The new National Croquet Center in Florida also had a dream. They envied us our week long summer tournaments, when 30 or 40 players all got together at venues like Hurlingham and Budleigh and played several events, with drinks on the terrace and informal dinners together with friends. Well, our American cousins decided to do something about their dream, too.

The result is that both dreams will become reality next year. The NCC is hosting an English-style association tournament during the second week of February. It is designed to appeal to Brits - having English formats, English laws, English management; with some Americans likely to be joining us, too.

Importantly, the weather in Palm Beach, Florida, in February is about the same as here in July - perhaps the odd shower, but mostly very warm and pleasant.

Bob Alman is the US-based co-ordinator. He will make sure the lawns are in tip-top condition, that lunches are available and will lay on some social events, such as a welcoming reception and tournament dinner/prize-giving.

The tournament will be managed jointly by Ian Plummer, of Oxford CC, and myself. Our emphasis will be on serious croquet, with a relaxed enough style such that everybody will enjoy themselves. We also need to provide flexibility, since it is quite likely that some will wish to take days off for trips to see the Everglades alligators and the like.

Here we are fortunate in having a specialist tour operator involved. One of the partners of Diplomatic Travel Ltd. is John Hobbs daughter, Nicky Evans. Not only is she familiar with croquet but her company has organised similar trips for bowls players, jazz enthusiasts and other groups.

Diplomatic Travel has negotiated favourable prices for the flights and accommodation, they are organising a number of excursions as well as all those important but tedious details like transfers to and from the airport.

So, the whole package has been put together - at a very favourable price - for everyone to enjoy a croquet-based holiday (with spouses/partners) in Florida in February. The dream is set to be realised.



Play Croquet in Florida in February

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British croquet players are invited to an eight-day association rules tournament at the new US National Croquet Centre at Palm Beach, Florida. The weather in Florida in February is similar to England's in July, so you can enjoy their sub-tropical climate and hospitality.

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Tournament Details

Kevin Carter: 0118-971-2948 or kevin@profundus.com

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Dust the cobwebs from your mallet and get away for a break!

WE HAVE BUILT IT. WHO WILL COME?

Bob Alman reports from American croquet's newly completed Florida home

The National Croquet Center clubhouse did not open until May - the end of the high season in Palm Beach County. Nevertheless, we embarked on a series of parties and mixers to invite people to the Center and to generate stories in the press about our existence. The people started coming, in a steady stream. What life is about at the Center is giving tours to prospective members, curiosity seekers, corporate clients, visiting croquet players...everyone who walks through the door.

Typically, the tour begins in the central hall by the elegant mahogany-railed staircase. By the first landing there is a huge oil painting of Hurlingham, to provide a point of departure for the tour. British-born architect Digby Bridges explicitly used Hurlingham as the model for this Center. I point out the painting to visitors and say something like, "Hurlingham is the most famous croquet venue in the world. And before the National Croquet Center was built, it was one of the biggest." I enjoy telling them about Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman being denied membership. At Hurlingham. "Do you know why?" I ask? Of course, they never do. "Two reasons," I say. "The first one is very English: 'They have to be on the

list, like everyone else.'" Then I pause and say, "The second is even more English: 'They're movie people!'"

I don't even know if the story is true, but it works. It tells them we let people in, we want to succeed, we're not stuck in a mould.

Why is the National Croquet Center in South Florida? Let me count the reasons.

In New York or San Francisco or Los Angeles, or even in some more "central" location like Chicago or Kansas City, we wouldn't have the opportunities we have here.



For one thing, I wouldn't get frequent invitations to civic clubs and for radio spots to go and talk about the National Croquet Center. And it wouldn't be so easy to get abundant local press. The reason is that Palm Beach County is a small town with a million people in it. The Center is already well known and appreciated as "the biggest and best" and a jewel for the County, simply because of that small-town civic pride.

When the question period comes after those luncheon speeches, there are inevitably questions like, "What marketing studies lead you to spend five million dollars on this Center in Palm Beach County?" And, "What kind of revenue does your business plan call for to support it?"

Those questions are easy to answer. The Center was created solely out of the vision of one man: Chuck Steuber. Nobody took him seriously until he spent \$750,000 to buy a ten-acre parcel of land close to the coast in West Palm Beach. The marketing studies done in America would only discourage the enterprise. They reveal that nobody takes croquet seriously as a sport, it is widely ridiculed, and in fact it's just about the most uncool thing you can do - especially if you're under 50.

Sometimes this attitude turns into outright hostility. After one full-page story in the Sports section of the big local newspaper, the Palm Beach Post, we were treated to a full ten minutes of "hate radio" on one of those programs now popular in America that put two supposedly hip people on the air to chatter about this and that. They don't need any information to vent their opinions with great passion. Although the story was accurate, the headline writer got it wrong. It said, "Enormous public facility for croquet opens in West Palm Beach." That set off the radio tirade: "They're spending public money on croquet when people don't have jobs and children are starving??!" They're putting your tax dollars into that stupid thing where you stick coat-hangers in the ground and knock balls through them??! Somebody should do something! This is an outrage!"

As a part-time publicist, I have to regard all publicity as good publicity. But these two idiots do reveal clearly the popular misconception about the sport. They don't even *know* it's a sport.

So the first and most important task in making this Center viable is to *rebrand* the sport - not to argue with the received knowledge most people have about croquet, whether they're thinking of croquet toys in the backyard, or the slow-moving, puzzling rituals old

people in white enact on croquet lawns behind country club walls. We have to re-brand around Golf Croquet - a game that people can learn to play with enjoyment in mere minutes. We have to re-brand around youth. You don't have to be over 60 to play croquet. In America, where croquet was deliberately promoted as a sport for the affluent class, we have to re-brand for the middle class.

All of these notions go against the grain of common knowledge about croquet - what everybody knows about croquet in South Florida. But if they're true - if we really ARE making serious moves in these directions, that's news. The press loves against-the-grain stories. We've got them aplenty.

Here's the marketing campaign, in brief: The National Croquet Center earns a strong local reputation as an inclusive Center for the sport that welcomes everyone. We work especially hard on our corporate programs for team-building and executive development, to get a steady stream of corporate business from local companies and from the many conventions that come here regularly from all over the world. As a showcase facility, our breakthrough efforts locally eventually get national attention. Word spreads throughout the country. National associations in other countries emulate our example, and the sport embarks on an unprecedented era of growth.

That's the dream, anyway, that comes out of the vision.

South Florida has seasons, and in the summer season, most of the "regulars" go north, and nothing much is happening here. It's our chance to go after an entirely new demographic, without interfering with the club members

paying the bills. Middle class people. High school youth. Young professionals. We have proved that there really is life here in the summer. Sometimes it's hot. But morning croquet and twilight croquet are good bets, even in summer. And summer showers are a delight, when experienced from our 140-foot long covered veranda.

Sociologists have likened South Florida to a house with many rooms that don't connect - many classes of people occupying adjacent space, but in totally different modes of living.

The sport of croquet was financed and brought into being by South Florida's affluent class - the people to live here in the "high season" and somewhere else, up north, in the summer; Newport, or Maine, or the Hamptons. That's why croquet players said that the new National Croquet Center in Palm Beach was going to be totally deserted in the high summer.

They were right - most of the "croquet people" aren't here in the summer.

They were also wrong - because there *are* people here in summer living more-or-less normal lives, working, playing, having families, enjoying retirement, and looking for interesting things to do. Some of those people have discovered the National Croquet Center, and several dozen of them have become Summer members. Beginning from dead zero in early June, there was a healthy level of daily activity from new members by mid August, combined with a growing number of croquet players from other clubs with new dual memberships who have already discovered that the Center is a great place to gather for both play and socializing.

In early July, a weekly "Twilight Croquet" party was invented. People



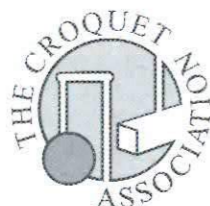
“ 'Croquet is just about the most uncool thing you can do - especially if you're under 50. The first task in making this Center viable is to rebrand the sport' ”

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bring a dish, come to play beginning at 3:30p.m., stay till sundown around 8:00 o'clock, and in between, they play croquet, drink, eat, and enjoy the kind of courtside experience that really isn't available at the other South Florida clubs. The clubhouse with its magnificent veranda makes all the difference.

But the membership activity is only part of the organizational jigsaw that will make this unique Center economically viable. To succeed, the place must be "sold" - at a steep price, and frequently - for weddings, for private parties, and especially for corporate affairs. Ultimately, the princes of commerce will make this Center work, with everything from employees/ client events to spousal outings for visiting corporations to serious "executive development retreats" that include many difference activities along with one adaptation or another of Golf Croquet.

Palm Beach County is a major center for business conventions, incentive travel, and corporate getaways of all sorts. They come from all over the world. A British pharmaceutical company makes one of the largest corporate pilgrimages each year to The Breakers resort, pumping many millions into the local economy. Some of it will come our way, because the National Croquet Center is the biggest and best in the world - it will be the new, hot thing to do. The companies that come here year after year tell their tour operators and destination managers, "We want to do something new and different." For the present, we're new and different. We're in demand. Next year something else will be new and different, so we have to do a good job from Day One to succeed here.

It's easy to get noticed here. In New York or San Francisco, I would have to exert myself to get a speaking engagement on a radio station to talk about croquet. Not here. Here they call *me*, and they're genuinely interested. The National Croquet Center is a point of pride. It really *is* the biggest and the best, and Palm Beach County doesn't have a lot of that.

Yes, the county does have its distinctions: More golf courses than any other on the continent - 300. The most elderly people per capita. The highest likelihood of dying in a freeway crash. An enormous number of 15-million-dollar mansions. A lot of poor people. And more convicted felons than you can find in any other state of the union. How are all those elements connected? You figure it out.

The important point is that this Center can become very well known locally, it's something the county can be proud of and that locally businesses and civic organizations can support enthusiastically. It's beautiful and it's unique. Our Café Croquet is elegant and serves wonderful food. This is something everyone knows about and wants to see. Our big job is showing them exactly how they fit it and letting them know that they really *do* fit it.

About once a century, it seems, a magnificent showcase facility is built to glorify and popularize the sport. A little over a hundred years ago, it was Wimbledon. Something went awry there, and lawn tennis was the main beneficiary. That must not happen in West Palm Beach. If we perfect the right formula to support the Center financially, it is inevitable that the sport will benefit. And every serious croquet player - everyone truly committed to promoting the growth of this great and greatly undervalued sport - has a stake in our success. If the National Croquet Center does not succeed, croquet will have to wait another century for someone with money, and guts, and vision to try again.

At first, there were many doubts. But now, members, donors, volunteers, and dual members with other South Florida clubs are beginning to show outstanding support for this Center - as an ongoing laboratory of programs and events, as the place where everyone comes together to enjoy croquet - whichever game they may play.

This is America's 21st Century Wimbledon. It happens no more than once a century. We don't intend to muffle the opportunity. Come and see it for yourself.

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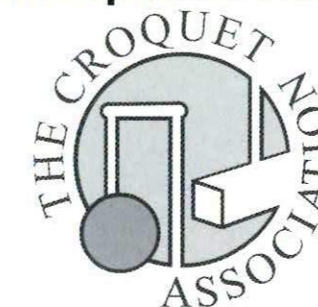
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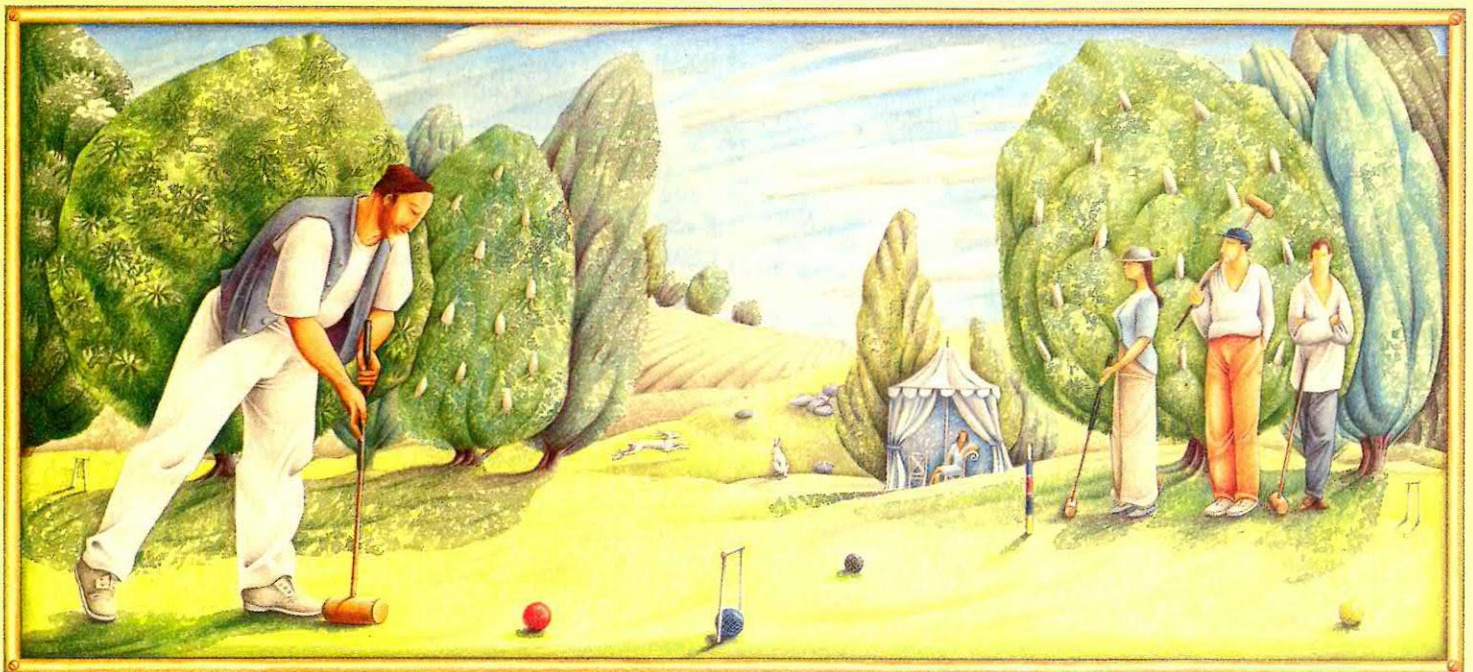
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