

THE CROQUET GAZETTE

ISSUE 283 - JANUARY 2003

Inside :

9th WCF World Croquet Championship
Croquet at War
The Handicap debate continues...



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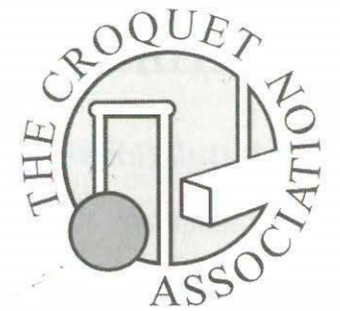
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Chairman's Column

Congratulations

News from Wellington, New Zealand cheered us all up on a wintry December Sunday when we heard that Robert Fulford had regained his World Champion title, and that John Gibbons had won the Plate Event. Congratulations to them both.



I was also delighted to be told that Michael Hague had been voted 'Coach of the Year' for 2002. Michael has made a really significant contribution to croquet coaching and it's good when such efforts on the CA's behalf are suitably recognised.

Conferences

We shall be holding some Club Conferences before next season (details elsewhere in this issue). This is an opportunity for committee members (and others of course) of Federations and clubs to question Council members about any aspect of the CA's work, and for us to listen to views about some changes we are planning - including some that are intended to give more help to our member clubs. I hope the details that follow of what CA committees have been, and are, striving to achieve may trigger some feedback from you.

Meantime - may you be happy with your handicap in 2003 . . .

Quiller

CA Committees at work

Council's report to the last AGM included a summary of the progress our committees had made on achieving the objectives they had set themselves for 2002. And, at its last meeting in December, Council approved specific objectives for 2003. Here are our successes, failures and the work that is still in progress. The

list excludes the routine, and time-consuming, tasks that all the CA's committees continuously tackle.

Administration 2003

- ♦ Set up an IT sub-committee to review the CA's hardware and software, and recommend future requirements.

- ♦ Produce a Health and Safety policy.

Coaching 2002

Successful Coach Qualification Courses were held at Surbiton, Southport and Cheltenham; more are planned next year.

Revisions to the *Coaching Manual* have not yet been completed and the committee is still investigating the possibility of producing a coaching video or DVD.

2003

- ♦ Complete the revision of the *Association Croquet Coaching Manual* and draft a Golf Croquet equivalent.

Development 2002

Grants from the CA to Budleigh Salterton, Cheltenham and Sussex County are enabling these clubs to carry out work to improve their lawns that are used for major CA tournaments. Grants were also made to some smaller clubs and to Federations.

A working party on Gateball has not reached any conclusions; the initial impetus to promote the game at Southport has not been maintained.

A Lawns Advisory Group has been established to help clubs.

2003

- ♦ Identify and assist clubs embarking on capital projects.
- ♦ Carry out an audit of CA-owned property lent to clubs and Federations, ascertaining extent of use.

Equipment 2003

- ♦ Consultation and completion of new protocol for testing croquet balls.

Golf Croquet 2002

The significant growth of golf croquet continues at club and Federation levels. But entries to some CA competitions have not been as great as anticipated and the reasons for this are being sought.

It is too early to rate the success of the automatic handicapping system for golf croquet.

The CA is ready to work with other national bodies to produce a set of rules suitable for all levels of play world-wide, but full international co-operation is proving to be difficult.

Work continues to train and qualify referees.

2003

- ♦ Investigate the reasons why entries to competitions are unbalanced at north/south venues. The priority will be to consolidate existing events.
- ♦ Foster an increase of golf croquet events within association croquet tournaments held by member clubs.
- ♦ Encourage top level competition in preparation for international competitions.
- ♦ Work towards publishing one set of golf croquet rules for all levels of play that can be accepted by the major national governing bodies.

Handicapping 2003

- ♦ Publish *Handicap Guidelines and Procedures* for the 2003 season.
- ♦ Update the list of Handicappers and make new appointments.
- ♦ Consult clubs and individual players about establishing uniform handicapping for the one-ball game and including it in the Automatic Handicapping System.

International 2002

The CA has increased its influence on the World Croquet Federation and now has stronger links with the NZCC, ACA and USCA. We have not yet arranged matches with emerging association croquet nations such as Canada and Egypt.

The WCF has accepted our bid to hold the Association Croquet World Championship in England in 2005.

An elite training squad has been set up and special coaching is being given to juniors with the potential to reach top-class play.

2003

- ♦ Continue to develop stronger links with the NZCC, ACA, USCA and individual members of the WCF management committee.
- ♦ Submit detailed plans for the 2005 World Association Croquet Championship to the WCF by September 2003.
- ♦ Run a training programme for the 2003 MacRobertson Shield GB team.

Laws 2002

Printed versions of the *Official Rulings on the Laws of Croquet* will soon be available.

Work continues on producing a new edition of the *Basic Laws of Croquet* and on publishing material about referee training.

2003

- ♦ Publish *The Basic Laws of Association Croquet*.
- ♦ Review the role, training, and examination of assistant referees.
- ♦ Prepare and publish material about the training of referees on the CA website.

Management 2002

Inter-committee communication has improved.

Communications between the CA's committees and our members have

relied on the Secretary, the Gazette and the website. There is still plenty of scope for our committees to provide more information, and possibly interaction, on the latter.

Council members have not reviewed as many long-term policy issues as anticipated and this is being addressed.

2003

- ♦ Create a stronger volunteering culture.

Marketing 2002

Jeff Dawson was appointed as the new CA Agent and sales revenue continues to grow at a healthy rate.

A very successful survey of croquet players was carried out and committees are using the results to help them plan ahead.

The public relations function is being strengthened.

Work continues on creating a membership canvassing kit, on attracting more legacies, and on an awareness campaign of the benefits that CA membership can bring. A new initiative is being considered to encourage non-member clubs to join the CA. (Individual Associate and Club membership of the CA remain static at 1604 and 120 respectively.)

2003

- ♦ Develop a membership canvassing kit.
- ♦ Consider new initiatives to improve the benefits that the CA offers to members.
- ♦ Develop and implement a CA membership leaflet selling the benefits of the CA.
- ♦ Raise the profile of croquet through the effective use of PR.
- ♦ Approach manufacturers of croquet sets with a view to publicising CA member clubs.

Publishing 2002

The CA's website has been redesigned

with a new structure.

Plans are being made to integrate the website with databases used for administration and sales.

2003

- ♦ Integrate the website with the CA Shop database.
- ♦ Archive 2002 website material as appropriate.
- ♦ Encourage other committees to take more responsibility for the content of their sections of the website.
- ♦ Support and advise the editor of the Gazette in obtaining suitable copy, and to consider on-line material where appropriate.

Tournaments 2002

Many CA tournaments were oversubscribed.

There has been more interest shown in Schools and Students championships.

The Fixtures Calendar was published on schedule.

Consultation with players took place regarding the changed format of the Open Championships and the majority were in favour of it.

2003

- ♦ Consider the initial qualification rounds of the All England Handicap Championship in order to encourage more entries.

Sport England Working Party 2002

Little progress has been made on compiling a Strategic Development Plan for the CA.

2003

- ♦ Write a Strategic Development Plan.

Letters

President's Appeal

Associates will no doubt be wondering what are the results of the appeal launched by the CA to replenish the funds used for the building of the new CA office at Cheltenham.

It was my pleasure to write personally to all members in October asking for donations. I would like to say immediately that I may have offended a few, because, faced with over 20 address labels for "Smith" I had to think hard whether I knew any of them personally and may well have written "Dear Michael" instead of "Dear Martin". Equally I may have written "Dear Mr. Jones" and the recipient may have thought, "why on earth didn't he say "Dear Bob"", if so, please accept my apologies.

I wrote just over 1,400 letters and it is wonderful that, at the time of writing, 245 members have responded, and the total received to date is £14,034. No target was ever set for this appeal, though the appeal letter stated that the costs of the new office would be over £50,000. We can surely regard

the result as very satisfactory and I would like to send my grateful thanks to all those who contributed, at whatever level. All donations have been acknowledged by the Secretary, and I have also personally acknowledged the major contributions.

The appeal is still open and any who have lost the form, or put it at the bottom of their in-tray, may still contribute. I can tell you that the new office has been running from the beginning of October and Nigel is very satisfied with the facilities he has and the fine view of the courts at Cheltenham.

I very much appreciate the support of so many of our members.

John Solomon
President.

Drug testing

When Martin Granger Brown says "Most of us 'Vets' are on something" [Drugs control - an effective

policy? - Issue 282] is he referring to recreational drugs such as the animal anaesthetic (and powerful psychedelic) Ketamine - which he would presumably have easy access to in his line of work, or prescribed and OTC medicines? Personally I cannot think of anything worse than busybody doctors taking blood samples at croquet tournaments. The advocacy of dope testing at all Rankings-counting tournaments (meaning all Advanced events - which account for a quarter of all fixtures) would be a criminal waste of money in a sport with very little to spare.

It would also be a waste of time, as most substances on the IOC's banned list offer no advantage to a croquet player. Opiates and diuretics, for example, are on the list because they can reduce the pain of strenuous exercise and help clinch a weigh-in by evacuating unusually large amounts of urine. Preparation for croquet requires no strenuous exercise and the game has no weight limit, making these substances irrelevant.

But what about the pills that do help? The fact that most croquet "champions" are in their 20's and 30's suggests that better hand-to-eye co-ordination and greater aggressiveness in this age group more than make up for any advantage gained by the Beta Blocker generation. It is interesting to note that in sports such as Archery and Shooting these are the only drugs tested for.

As for Martin fearing his pills give him an unfair advantage over the younger player, I can put his mind at rest. The average 17 year old is on a far stronger cocktail of ecstasy and marijuana. While the latter is on the IOC's list (but not always tested for), it isn't clear if the other is, and certainly most of Aldous Huxley's medicine cabinet isn't. If you get TP'd by an old hippie who enjoys 500 micro-grams of LSD with his morning tea, there's damn all you could complain about!

Finally, before hordes of pill-popping octogenarians demand the right to be dope tested, they should heed the

sad story of professional snooker player Bill Werbeniuk, who suffered a medical condition causing his hands to shake, the only cure for which was over each frame to consume nine or ten pints of larger (as a medicine it entitled him to a tax rebate). To cope with this quite large intake of alcohol Werbeniuk started taking Inderal on the advice of his doctors. Unfortunately Inderal is on the snooker governing body's banned list, facing him with the stark choice between snooker and good health. Thankfully he chose the latter and returned to his native Canada to earn his living at the less regulated sport of pool. So my advice is if you're "on something", be it Beta Blockers or Heroin, then shut up about drugs tests! Let's not allow croquet to be polluted by over-regulation.

Russell Bretherton
London

The Burnett System

I was pleased to see the coverage of handicaps in the last two issues of the gazette. As a player who has moved through most of the handicap range (24 to -1/2) in the last few years I have seen the problems at first hand and from all angles. Contrary to the belief of some, they do exist!

It was with great interest therefore that I read David Jenkinson's letter in the November issue of the *Gazette* regarding the "Burnett variation". Knowing things make sense in theory is one thing but seeing that they work in practice is another. I have heard, via the grapevine over the course of the year, various reports that it has been working well.

The North West Federation at its AGM in November voted to try the variation next year for all handicap league games, singles and doubles.

With about three hundred games over the course of the season it will give the system a good trial before it is assessed again at the end of the year.

As pointed out in my original letter the mathematics are simple, there is nothing to remember during the course of the game and it enables games to be played in the spirit and style that was originally intended. I will report back at the end of next season and let players know how it fared.

Bob Burnett
Chairman NWFCC

Egyptian Croquet

The proposal to rename 'Golf Croquet' is in my view misplaced and ignores just how appropriate and compelling the present title is. Apart from the obvious similarity of playing each hole/hoop in turn, the skill required at 'Golf Croquet' closely reflects that required for the Royal and Ancient game of 'Golf'.

At 'Golf' it is all about 'getting on and down in two' - so with croquet. One wins the toss and plays Blue, being first on the green/lawn. At the top level one should putt/approach over a distance of some 21 yards from Corner IV to a 'gimme' distance in front of the first hole/hoop. Assuming one is not interfered with, one then sinks the putt/makes the hoop. It is then one's opponent's turn to have the first putt/approach over 21 yards to the second hole/hoop, and so on round the course.

Where the two games diverge is the croquet clearance shot - a foul at 'Golf'. In 'Golf Croquet', if shooting is not an immediate option, it is vital to 'boss' the area in front of the hoop. Thus that first long putt/approach shot is all important - Never up, never in (control) being equally applicable whether swinging a putter or a mallet.

Jeremy Hackett
Medway Croquet Club

PS As the French word for a hoop is *l'arceau* should not 'Golf Croquet' referees be required from the start of next

season to revert to the mother language of our game when announcing a hoop successfully run? Surely, just a matter of *l'etiquette*?

Heraldry

I opened one of my books on heraldry today and found the following, which is an interesting insight into the croquet world of Edwardian England.

Croquet then, and in my early post-war experience, was a pretty upper-class game. The first member of the Croquet Association whom I met was Lord Tollemache, and, on my grandmother's first visit to the Compton Club (to watch me play my father on a hired lawn), she was delighted to be asked whether she was Lady Wilton.

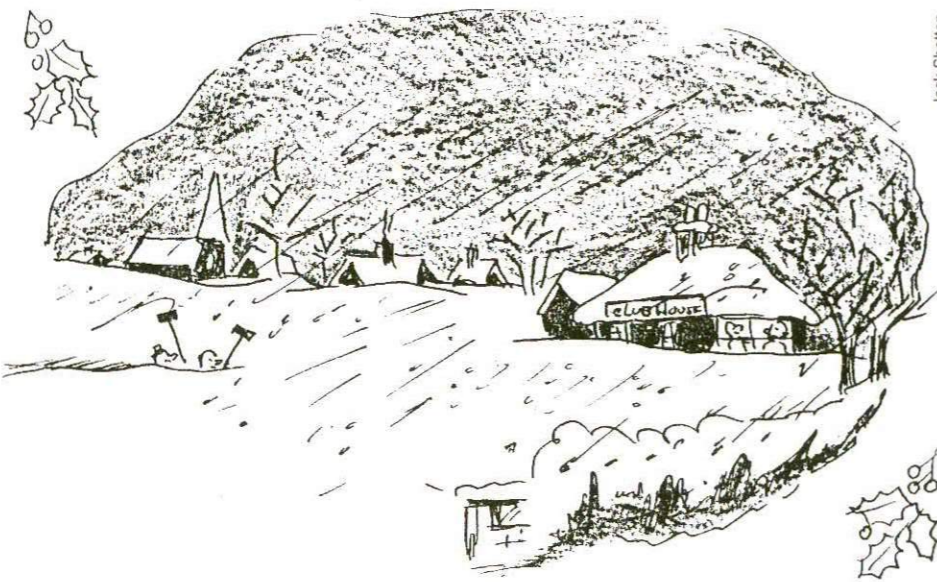
On that day I bought at the club my first mallet - a lignum vitae Corbally, price 10s 6d - which saw me from a high bisquer to -0.5.

CROQUET PROPER

(This short poem appeared in the *Croquet Gazette* dated 21st November 1907. In those days the balls were played in the sequence blue, red, black, yellow - Allen Parker.)

Crossed on vert table
Hammers of Thor,
Azure and Sable
V. Gules and Or.
'Gules upon Azure'
Opens the fray;
Be but your play sure,
Conquer you may.
Here for a week? Whence?
Sure of the rules,
Stick to the sequence
'Sable on Gules',
'Or upon Sable',
'Azure on Or';
Crossed on vert table
Hammers of Thor!

Name and address supplied



A brilliant piece of strategy, arranging to play the doubles final in January. They won't turn up and we claim the match...

In defence of the Automatic Handicap System

An analysis by Michael Blackwell, Chairman of Handicap Coordination Committee

I read with interest the debate on handicapping on recent pages of The Gazette. I have produced the following to suggest an answer to some of the issues raised. In this article I have not been able to address all the issues that have been raised, however, I hope to respond to the issues that I have not dealt with in a later issue of The Gazette. Players with long memories may notice that some of my reasoning is similar to that used in the full bisque controversy of some years ago. I look forward to reading players' responses in future editions.

The simple and complex objectives of the handicap system

The AHS ensures that, on average, players should win half of their handicap games. We shall call this the simple objective of the handicap system. If a player does not win half his games he will gain or lose index points till his handicap reaches an equilibrium value at which he should win, on average, half his handicap games. If a player's handicap is significantly out of line the Handicap Guidelines permit a handicapper alter the player's handicap to accelerate this process.

However the AHS does not ensure that any two players each have a 50% chance of winning a handicap game between them. We shall call this the complex objective of the handicap system. This is not a flaw in the AHS (as it would apply to any other method of allocating handicaps). As explained below, the inability of the handicap system to satisfy the complex objective is a feature of the handicap-difference method of allocating bisques in handicap games.

A few examples

To examine this further we shall consider a system in which players Aloysius, Bertie and Charles have the following handicaps:

Player	Handicap
Aloysius ("a")	0
Bertie ("b")	5
Charles ("c")	16

We shall use some simple notation. Let:

$W(x,y) = 0.5$
stand for the probability of x defeating y in a handicap game being 50%.

Scenario 1

Let: $W(a,b) = 0.5$; and
 $W(b,c) = 0.5$

Charles plays to a standard which gives him a 50% chance of defeating Bertie when he receives 11 bisques. However this does not make him play like a handicap 5, but only to an equivalent standard - the quality of his strokes and tactics would still be those of a 16 handicap. Thus an extra bisque would be of less value to Charles than to Bertie.

When Charles and Bertie each play Aloysius they will have an additional 5 bisques compared to when they played each other. Bertie will be able to do more with these bisques than Charles. Thus Bertie's standard of play against Aloysius will be better than Charles's standard of play against Aloysius. Since Bertie has a 50% chance of beating Aloysius, the probability of Charles beating Aloysius is less than 50%.

Thus: $W(a,c) > 0.5$

Scenario 2

Let: $W(b,c) = 0.5$; and
 $W(a,c) = 0.5$

Charles needs 11 bisques to have a 50% chance of defeating Bertie. Again, he does not play like a handicap 5 but only to an equivalent standard.

When Charles and Bertie each play Aloysius they will have an additional 5 bisques compared to when they played each other. Bertie will be able to do more with these bisques than Charles. Thus Bertie's standard of play against Aloysius will be better than Charles's standard of play against Aloysius. Since Charles has a 50% chance of beating Aloysius, the probability of Bertie beating Aloysius is greater than 50%.

Thus: $W(b,a) > 0.5$

Scenario 3

Let: $(a,b) = 0.5$; and
 $(a,c) = 0.5$

Charles requires 16 bisques to play to

an equivalent standard to Aloysius, while Bertie requires 5 bisques to do so.

As the better player, one bisque will be of more use to Bertie than to Charles. Thus if they both have 5 bisques taken away from the number of bisques required for them to play to a standard equivalent to Aloysius's, the deterioration in Bertie's standard of play will be more marked. This is the number of bisques Charles and Bertie receive when they play each other. Accordingly Charles will play at a better standard than Bertie when they play each other in handicap games.

Thus: $W(c,b) > 0.5$

Synopsis

Thus we have seen that the function W is non-transitive, that is to say if:

x requires (y - x) bisques for $W(x,y) = 0.5$; and

y requires (z - y) bisques for $W(y,z) = 0.5$

It does not follow that:

x requires (z - x) bisques for $W(z,x) = 0.5$

Put another way, the handicap system cannot satisfy the complex objective.

Naturally, the above examples are simplifications of reality. In all three scenarios players handicaps have been 'anchored' at a fixed value - that is to say there is one handicap value against which all players in the system have a 50% chance of winning. The anchor value is 5, 16 and 0 in scenarios 1, 2 and 3 respectively.

In reality there is no one fixed anchor value. When a player's handicap is initially set or subsequently altered it will either be anchored at about scratch (if it is set in accordance with the test outlined in the Handicap Guidelines) or, more realistically, it will be anchored at the handicap of the handicapper who set the handicap (who will assume that his handicap is correct and will use it as a benchmark).

After playing several games in the AHS a player's handicap will adjust to the value required for him to win half his games, and his anchor value will adjust to be a function of the handicaps of the opponents he has recently

played.

Since no two players have identical match histories players will have different anchor values. However, for most players the distribution of their opponents' handicaps (especially for players who play mostly within clubs) will be similar. Thus we may assume players have the same anchor values.

Applying the reasoning in the above scenarios the following generalisations may be derived. For any players x and y with handicaps of H(x) and H(y) respectively and for any anchor value t, if:

$H(x) > t > H(y)$ then $W(y,x) > 0.5$
following scenario 1

$t > H(x) > H(y)$ then $W(x,y) > 0.5$
following scenario 2

$H(x) > H(y) > t$ then $W(x,y) > 0.5$
following scenario 3

Thus the lower handicapped player only has the advantage in handicap games when his handicap is below the anchor value and his opponent's hand-

icap is above the anchor value.

Implications for the handicap system

Some players may be tempted to call for reform of the bisque allocation method, so the handicap system can satisfy the complex objective. However such calls should be resisted.


Any such reform would make the handicap system far too complex for most players. Already many players struggle to calculate the number of bisques due in doubles matches and shortened games. Also, such a system would have to be created by a process of trial and error over several seasons, during which the trial system would be unlikely to satisfy even the simple objective.

Even if a system were implemented that satisfied the complex objective, the idea that any player would have a 50% chance of winning a game against any other player is more theoretical than real. Factors such as lawn speed

would distort these probabilities, fast lawns favouring the lower handicapped player.

Thus most of the arguments presented for reform of the AHS are flawed. True, it cannot deal with the "bandit" whether he be a rapid improver or someone who plays little tournament croquet. But dealing with the "bandit" is not the task of the AHS (except in the long term). That is the job of the club or tournament handicapper.

By satisfying the simple objective of the handicap system the AHS achieves the most that can be expected of a handicap system while the handicap-difference method of bisque allocation is used. Furthermore, any attempt to modify the bisque-difference rule to achieve the complex objective would result in a far too complex handicap system and would not, in practice, satisfy the complex objective.



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Bi-Polar Croquet & the AHS

Geoffrey Cuttle argues for reform of current handicapping

David Mooney's article in the September *Gazette* and the resulting correspondence and editorial in November address concerns which I have been analysing over several seasons. As a result of that I believe I have statistical evidence that there is a real problem, that I can identify how it has been caused, and that I can propose corrective action to achieve a long-term solution.

There are a variety of different factors involved and to understand them it is best to consider them in turn rather than attempt to leap to the final conclusion. The first factor (demonstrated by this correspondence) is the widely expressed perception that the handicap game is becoming unattractive for many lower handicap players. It is not obvious whether that is because the lower player loses more handicap games against higher opponents or whether such games are just less satisfying for the low handicap players. But there is no doubt about the perception and the potential risks of polarisation if it is allowed to fester. The recent correspondence proposes various suggestions to make the handicap game more attractive, but all of these address only the symptoms rather than the underlying causes.

My first step was to look for statistical evidence to show whether the perception was real or imagined, and whether it was static or getting worse over the years. I developed a simple database program to consolidate and analyse the results of handicap tournament events and with the co-operation of the managers (Paul MacDonald, Bob Stevens and Richard Hoskyns) acquired the results of the Silver Jubilee Cup handicap at the Hurlingham Summer Tournament for most of the last ten years. I chose this event not just because the results were accessible but also because it is large enough for them to be statistically significant when aggregated, because the event attracts a broad and representative spread of handicap levels, and it has been managed in a consistent way for many years.

The complete analysis would take

several pages and be of interest only to statistical anoraks. But its conclusions are significant:

For 1999-2002 combined (402 games) there was a swing of 4.5% in favour of the player receiving bisques. The average handicap was 5.8

For 1993-1995 combined (223 games) the corresponding swing was only 1.3% and the average handicap was 4.7

Although the swings are small, they are sufficiently great in relation to the number of games involved to be statistically significant and they do show a real though modest advantage to the player receiving bisques and that the advantage is gradually increasing. They also suggest that the average handicap is similarly increasing and by implication that the spread is widening. Incidentally all handicap calculations in the system are performed using handicap steps rather than absolute values though the results are translated back again in the summaries.

All of this confirmed the perceptions and also supported a theory that has been around for many years. I first wrote about it to Bill Lamb (at that time the Chairman of the Handicap Committee) in 1992, but it had been proposed by others before then. This argues that because the AHS always gives and takes an equal number of points after every game, the total number of index points in the system remains constant unless there are external factors. There are two small exceptions, the extra points added when a rapid improver is exceptionally promoted, and points taken out when an infirm player is adjusted, but these are both too infrequent to make much difference and may well largely compensate for each other anyway. The major external factors are the impact of the significant number of players who enter the game each year and the (generally nearly equal) number who leave, because the new players come into the system at a handicap of 16-20 (adding about a 1000 points each whereas the more experienced leavers take out more like 1500 points.

Thus the system is gradually drained of points and because the total number of players remains steady this implies that the spread of handicaps must steadily increase at the same rate, pushing out the handicaps.

The arithmetic is inexorable and I suggest that it explains most of the perceptions and analysed results referred to. Those (like myself) who were handicappers before AHS will have observed that one meets players with handicaps of 12 or 14 who previously would have been playing off 10, and players enter tournaments with handicaps of 20 or 24 whereas the old limit was 16. Thus as the spread of handicaps increases so does the number of bisques given in games between disparate players and inevitably the advantage increases for the receiver. The statistical facts including the slight increase in the average handicap completely support the theory.

At this stage I must address two prevalent objections. One is that because the AHS causes a consistent player to stay at the same handicap, he must have won and lost an equal number of games. Therefore the system must be fair. This argument is only valid if he also wins and loses equally against higher handicaps as he does against lower, and perceptions and the analysis suggest this is not so. What is happening is that he (and all other players at the same level) are ending up at a slightly higher handicap than they merit so that the AHS reduces their disadvantage against higher opponents and increases their advantage against lower ones. Fairer - but not really fair.

The other objection is that there are a number of exceptional minus players who also play handicap games, and because they can demonstrate that they win the majority of those games they argue that the perceptions must be false. The point here (and again it is supported by the analysis, though the numbers are too small to be necessarily significant) genuine minus players have the ability to hit in and make breaks even before all the balls are on the lawn which means that they can

pre-empt the bisque receiver before he has a chance to use them for both his balls. Short of using my bisques for immediate maximum one ball breaks, Fulford or Bamford on form would still beat me even if I had an infinite forest. The same applies at the other end - there are some high bisque players who through initial inexperience, inability or just sheer stupidity will never win against a competent player however many bisques they receive. So any analysis has to exclude the two extremes, and my database allows for this.

Another argument, which is much more subjective, is that even if we were able to adjust the levels so that players won and lost equal numbers of games regardless of their relative handicaps, that would not necessarily be fair because where a large number of bisques are given the result is largely determined by how well or badly the recipient plays. This is because it is only after the recipient has exhausted his bisques that the lower handicap player (unless he is a genuine minus player) gets a chance to do anything other than hope for a lucky hit in. Thus some low handicap players might still be reluctant to enter handicap events. I suspect this may explain why the old, pre AHS, structure probably erred in the other direction. My recollection (when I was an improving 10 or so) was that I was always exceptionally pleased to beat a lower handicap player and disappointed if I lost to a high bisque opponent, which suggests there was a bias in favour of the giver which we all happily accepted. But this is really another debate - at this stage it would be a sufficient improvement if we could just eliminate the bias and leave the fine tuning for later.

Summarising so far, we need to find some mechanism that will counter the seepage of points from the system caused by joiners and leavers, reduce the excessive spread between scratch and the highest handicaps, and make low handicap players less reluctant to enter handicap events. Further, the mechanism must be self-correcting

so that it induces stability - it must correct but not over-correct. Therefore, in order to make a real effect it must be potentially uneven - that is there must be occasions when the winner receives a different number of index points than his opponent loses. Further, that unevenness must be capable of operating both ways so as to balance the system.

My proposal is that after a qualifying handicap game the higher handicap player gains or loses 10 index points as at present, but that the lower handicap player only gains or loses a lesser amount according to the difference in handicap steps. The easiest way to do this is to use the table provided for level play so that for example if a 3 loses to a 10 that is 9 steps and he only loses 2 index points. But the 10 gains a full 10 points so the system gains a net 8 points. Conversely if the 3 wins he only gains 2, the 10 still loses 10 and the system loses a net 8. If the system is properly balanced so that everyone wins and loses equally regardless their relative handicaps these effects will cancel out and the number of index points in the system stays level.

But, if the system is not balanced and (as it appears at present) favours the higher handicap player, then it will gain the extra points (8 in the example above) more frequently than it loses, the total number of points will slowly increase, the spread of handicaps will diminish and after a while (even if he is not actually improving) the 10 will become a 9 and fewer bisques will be given. This will continue until any advantage vanishes and the system becomes fair in the sense that a consistent player will win as many games as he loses regardless of the level of his opponent. If ever the process goes too far, the same allocation of points has the opposite effect and brings the spread back to the stable state.

There is an added bonus to the proposal in that it reduces the major deterrent for low handicap players entering handicap events. They will know that when they face a forest of bisques, with little opportunity for most of the

game to influence the result, they will only win or lose a one or two index points. So as far as their card is concerned it will only be the games against comparable players that have a major effect. For most players this should seem to be a fair contest reflecting their own performance and should make handicap events worth entering.

Finally some observations on likely questions if this proposal were adopted. First, are the points in the level play table appropriate? In fact it hardly matters what scale is used provided it increases with handicap difference - different levels will alter the rate at which the system stabilises but not the ultimate effect. The level play table exists, is understood by lower handicap players (who would be those who have to apply it most) and has the right sort of spread so it just seems sensible to use it rather than invent another table. Secondly, do we need to do anything special to correct the immediate imbalance? Personally I would be very happy to see a blanket reduction if that were desired (compressing the spread by about 20% say) but it would not be necessary if my proposal were adopted as that would achieve the same result over a few years. Thirdly, should we reduce the handicap at which players start? Personally I think we should - say to 20 in a club and 16 for tournaments (much as before AHS) but maybe that ought not to be done until the spread has been reduced a bit first.

I should prefer to leave these questions to the Handicap Committee, but I do ask them to give very serious consideration to my fundamental proposal and adopt that, or something that can achieve a similar self correcting effect, as soon as possible. This needs to be done before some of the more serious effects suggested by David Mooney's paper and observed by the other contributors start to damage the handicap game.

Inter Counties Championships

These days one must not immediately assume that when Inter Counties is mentioned, the reference is always to Association Croquet as the Golf Croquet Inter Counties Championship is gradually becoming established. The latter competition may be small at present but nevertheless is providing an excellent weekend's competition. We are now at the stage of looking forward to the 2003 competitions and the time has come to publish our list of County Organisers for both events. Whilst the Tournament and Golf Croquet committees use the Organisers as a central contact for all details about the actual competitions, the initial duty of each Organiser is to be a central contact for any player who is eligible to play for a particular county, and would like to be considered for the County team. Full details of all county Organisers for both competitions are given below.

Association Croquet Inter Counties, Southwick and Compton May 24-27, 2003

As many players in the 2002 event were aware, we had problems arising at the last moment due to the withdrawal of one team, the failure of another to raise more than three players and a third who lost a player through injury and had no reserves. As these problems were only brought to the attention of the Tournament Director a mere six weeks before the event, the decision taken was that it was too late to make any significant changes to the programme. A CA Select team was formed to keep the total teams at 22 and teams who were short of players were allowed to use non-qualified players to maintain the programme. It was stated at the time that teams using non-qualified players could not be promoted or win a division but we did not define how results against a non-qualified team would be counted in the championship.

Although the team that withdrew, Channel Islands, was in the first division, we felt that the CA Select team must compete in the second division

and therefore decided that the highest placed team in the first division in 2001 that had been relegated, should remain in the first division. Of course there were alternatives but that is the decision we made at the time.

The full Tournament Committee have now considered the situation, fully support the actions taken and have considered what the reaction should be to similar situations that may occur in the future. I have been asked by the Tournament Committee to let all players know the actions we propose to take in future.

Whilst the prime purpose of the event will be to decide the County Champion which can only be won by fully qualified teams, the Tournament Committee recognise the status of 'Counties' as a festival of Croquet. As such it is considered very important to maintain as full a playing programme as possible. We are sure that most players would rather play than have further byes, simply because there is not a fully qualified team to play. Should only 21 teams enter for future events, the CA Select Team will be formed to complete the second division. Also if it is unavoidable, guest players will be allowed at the discretion of the Tournament Director and Manager. If only 20 teams enter then we may revert to two divisions of 10. This could mean two byes if we maintain the four day programme. We have worked out a possible programme for fitting all games into three days but this would mean finishing late on a Bank Holiday Monday, which is not very popular with many players.

Since the divisional structure was started, it has been very noticeable that strong competition has been maintained right to the end of the event because of the implications of promotion and relegation. In a similar manner we feel that matches against the CA Select or teams using guest players must count towards the final result to ensure that teams simply do not go through the motions.

It is understood that the situations which caused the problems last year were known about some considerable

time before the Tournament Committee were informed. The Tournament Committee consider this to be totally unacceptable and should it happen again in the future, it could jeopardise that team's future in the competition. Organisers will be required in future to submit potential team members with their entry to the competition in September of the previous year.

At the summer meeting of the Tournament Committee it was agreed to grant County status to the Channel Islands should they wish to reapply at a future date. The committee is fully aware that this contradicted the statement in the 2002 Fixtures Book. However, as the area actually exists, is in the domain and contains member clubs, the committee felt there was full justification for such a decision. Channel Islands have since submitted a new application, which was considered at the October meeting of the Tournament Committee. An application was also submitted on behalf of Oxfordshire. This made a total of 12 teams for the second division but the Committee were not satisfied with the eligibility of the players submitted by Northamptonshire, so Channel Islands and Oxfordshire will make up the second division to eleven teams for 2003. The full programme for 2003 is now published on the CA web site.

Golf Croquet Inter Counties, Southwick 9-10 August, 2003

Last year we had five county entries and the total was made up to six by a CA Select team. Whilst the committee will be willing to organise a CA Select team in future years for players who would like to participate in this event but whose county cannot field a full team, we would prefer that all teams entering had a specific county allegiance. To make this possible in these circumstances, we would be happy to accept joint county teams for adjacent counties.

Bill Arliss, Tournament Director

County Organisers

Association Inter Counties

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Golf Croquet Review 2002

In the previous two years I have just tried to review activities in the previous season but this year I feel it may be more appropriate to have a look at the status of Golf Croquet generally before I turn to 2002. If we go back about five/six years, the general view of Golf Croquet amongst most active croquet players was that it was simply an introductory game for Association Croquet and only played regularly by the very ancient who could not master the intricacies of Association Croquet. I will freely admit that it was my personal view. How wrong I was!

The general change in perception of Golf Croquet in the UK really started when the WCF staged the World Golf Croquet Championship at Leamington in 1998. We saw for the first time how the Egyptians played the game and how games at top level could become exciting to watch. Applause from spectators in the middle of a game of croquet was almost unheard of in croquet circles. The main difference was that the rules were very simple and the aims very apparent so the spectator could appreciate what the players were trying to do. A clearance of a ball from the front of a hoop from 20 yards away or the running of a hoop from the same distance may not require the same levels of skill as a sextuple peel but it certainly seems more impressive to the uninitiated. I do not think at that time most of us fully realised the tactics that went into the game. Now some four years later and two more world championships over, I believe we have reached one very important milestone with Golf Croquet, that of respectability. A few years ago Golf Croquet was not even allowed to be played on the front lawns at Hurlingham but last year the Hurlingham team got through to the final of the Golf Croquet Inter Club competition, all home matches and the final having been played on the front lawns. Well done Hurlingham!

As more and more experienced association players try the game they are starting to accept that Golf Croquet is fully a game in its own right, with its own brand of tactics. Whilst some of

the skills of an association player, such as single ball accuracy and positioning are fundamental to top level performance in Golf Croquet, it should not be assumed that top level association players will automatically be top level Golf Croquet players.

I fully accept that Association Croquet is a more complex game which requires a wider variety of skills but Golf Croquet has some very distinct advantages in that the games are shorter and all players are continuously active throughout the whole game, both physically and mentally. Thus the game is much more social. However I believe its greatest advantage is its apparent simplicity, which is the best possible recruiting aid for new players into the croquet scene generally.

I have talked about skill levels, tactical requirements etc but I do not want to forget the many club players who will never enter competition outside their clubs. Golf Croquet in our clubs has provided an ideal social occupation for many such players. What better than an afternoon in good company, usually in very pleasant surroundings and with gentle exercise. It is probably in this area that the largest changes have been made statistically with quite large increases in the "social" Golf Croquet players.

One point I would make to club committees is that you should not always assume that every new croquet player will want to go on to association and should be pushed in that direction. Accept that those who have the competitive urge or those who want the more complex game will emerge from the general throng and then should be given all the necessary coaching to proceed along their chosen path. Even those who only want the social side of the game still appreciate basic coaching, as it allows them to get more enjoyment from their sport. To those traditional association croquet players who moan about the numbers of Golf Croquet players may I suggest you look at the major contribution these social players are making financially to the croquet infrastructure.

The Golf Croquet committee try to take a detailed look at all our competitions at the end of each season and modify or add to the programme for the following year as they feel appropriate.

Our flagship competition, the Golf Croquet Open Championship continues to grow in entries and this year will return to Sussex. A further event has been added in 2003 to cater for the higher handicapper. There will also be a level play championship for those with handicaps of 1 and over. Chris Sheen has sponsored a first prize of £100 for this event. We also hope to have sponsorship for prize money in the two major events. We are keeping our fingers crossed as two of the top Egyptians, two South Africans and one American have shown interest in playing in the 2003 event.

As you will see in the 2003 Fixtures Book, we have renamed the Ascot and Ranelagh Cups as the English National Championships which only recognises their true position. We accept that last year our choice of dates for the area heats were not well chosen and in 2003 we have reduced the possible venues. At the same time we've given more choice of dates in both the northern and southern areas.

The GC Inter Counties Championship was not as well supported as we would have wished, so a CA Select team was organised to make a total of six entrants. I had several enquiries from players whose county could not manage a full team but who would have liked to play and these players formed the basis of the CA Select team. However we would be quite happy to accept joint county teams in future years. There are organisers appointed for several counties: their names being published in this Gazette. Please contact them if you would be interested in playing in this event. If your county does not have an Organiser, please contact me directly.

The All England Handicap event found two glorious days for the final at Colchester. The entry would suggest that our handicap system is grad

ually finding its correct levels. The handicaps of the players in the final ranged from three -2's to four 6's with a -2, -1, 2 and 3 making it through to the semi-final. The final was between Abdul Ahmad from Pendle and Ray Mounfield from Ashby, Abdul coming through to take the title. The other competitors took heart that both the finalists managed to lose two handicap stroke from their effort in this event. In all the events I attended last year, both handicap and level, it was pleasing to see that most of the competitors were keeping a handicap card. It is only by this means that we shall produce a credible handicap system country-wide. If any clubs want further copies of handicap cards or the pamphlet on how the handicap system should be run and how to set initial handicaps, please get in touch with the CA Secretary.

As I mentioned earlier, the final of the Inter Club Golf Croquet event was played at Hurlingham between Hurlingham and Tyneside. Tyneside won the match but they did have to call on the services of two regular international players, John Moore and Derek Old.

This year we are introducing the Golf Croquet equivalent of the Presidents Cup in Association Croquet. This will be a weekend competition held between the top eight players chosen by the Selection Committee from those players who declare their availability for the competition. In 2003 it will be held at Hunstanton.

The World Golf Croquet Championships were held at the new National Croquet Center in Florida last March, and England had a good representation with 10 players competing. As expected the Egyptians swept the board, taking the first four places. The highest placed English player was Stephen Mulliner who finished 11th.

Many of you will have seen correspondence, or have heard from various sources who want to change the name of Golf Croquet to something different. The driving force behind this move would appear to be the WCF but they have not come up with a viable alternative of what they want to change it to. Nearly all of the feedback I have received has been against a name change and the CA will formally

oppose such a move.

It was our aim to produce a unified world wide set of rules for the game of Golf Croquet and not have to deal with CA and WCF rules, which in essence have very few differences in the way in which the game is actually played. Unfortunately due to illness amongst the WCF rules panel, progress has been very slow but we hope to achieve this aim during 2003.

We now have 35 Golf Croquet referees on the CA lists and hope to extend this further during the coming season. Please get in touch with me if you would like a qualification course organised in your area. Normally we would like a minimum of six entrants to make a course viable.

The Coaching Committee have recognised that there is a separate need for training coaches specifically for Golf Croquet and a successful course was run at Surbiton in 2002. A similar course will be run at Edgbaston in April 2003.

Bill Arliss, Chairman, CA Golf Croquet Committee

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Croquet at War

David Drazin finds the game surviving in the most difficult of circumstances

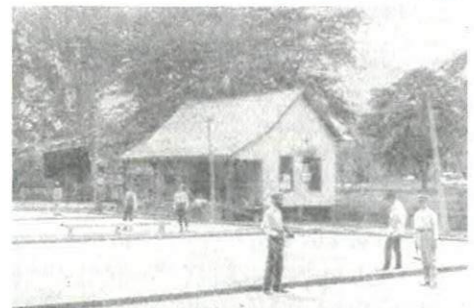
You don't have to believe in chaos theory to see war as a force for change in the croquet world.

The fortunes of war offer a rich source of material upon which to ponder the question that must recur in the mind of anyone looking back at the history of croquet. 'What if ...?' The several varieties of the game played today in different parts of the world probably all stem from the primitive game of tight croquet that emerged mysteriously in Ireland in the early years of the nineteenth century, and then evolved in different ways in response to local conditions. But it might well have been otherwise.

Very soon after croquet arrived here from Ireland about 1850, it was re-exported in much the same inchoate form by travellers to the British colonies, North America, and mainland Europe. But no more than a few years later developments of the game in Britain and the USA took different paths.

The British game was launched on a course of continuous refinement, marked by *The Field Laws* of 1866, the *Conference Code* of 1870, and the introduction of the Hale six-hoop setting in 1872.

By contrast, the American game made no coherent nationwide advance until the foundation in 1882 of the National American Croquet Association, which embarked on a radical course of reform, leading to the establishment of roque, played on a hard court like an outside billiard-table, allowing 'carom' strokes, as the American national game. Roque prospered. In 1889 the NACA changed its name to the National Roque



Grounds of the National Roque Association at Norwich, CT, circa 1900

Association and by 1933 it listed 176 clubs.

But events might have taken a very different turn had it not been for the American Civil War, which consumed the nation's energies from 1861 to 1865.



Croquet at the Edward Motley cottage, Nahant, MA, circa 1860 (courtesy Nahant Historical Society)

We know that croquet was established in New England before the war, and can reasonably assume that it continued to be played in private homes while the Yankee and confederate armies were locked in mortal combat. Men might have been in short supply, but a good few dodged the draft. Just as now, money spoke. If you stumped up the going price, you could pay for a substitute to march to war in your place. At all events, it is clear that in the early 1860s, when the British game was roaring ahead, the American game was frozen in the era of crinoline croquet.

In Britain, town squares were given over to croquet grounds, books on the subject clocked up serious sales, and the sports correspondents of such influential journals as *The Field* were leading a crusade to infuse rigour into the game. In America the game caught fire no less dramatically, but only at the end of the war. The time lag is nicely illustrated in the table below by the numbers of croquet books and articles I have traced year by year from either side of the Atlantic.

	Books		Articles in magazines	
	UK	USA	UK	USA
1861-63	7	-	17	-
1864	5	-	64	1
1865	5	5	41	6
1866	6	3	44	8

Of course, we shall never know, but it

is intriguing to speculate that, had it not been for the Civil War, advances in the game either side of the Atlantic might have marched in parallel rather than in different directions.

The world wars of the last century pose other questions. Were they merely responsible for blips in the onward march of croquet, or did they influence the longer-term development of the game in some more fundamental ways? And what was their impact on the game at national and club levels and in the world at large? The *Croquet Association Gazette*, which continued to be published, albeit less frequently, during both wars, offers some fascinating insights.

The Great War broke out in the summer of 1914. No one had any idea what to expect and in the early months the CA followed the government's call to carry on 'business as usual'. It was only towards the end of the croquet season, as mobilisation got into full stride, did it dawn on the nation that the war would soon come to dominate everyone's lives, and might continue to do so for years rather than months.

Most of the late season official fixtures were cancelled, either as a matter of practical expediency or out of a sense that they represented a form of indulgence which was inconsistent with a national emergency; but club play continued much as usual, albeit on a reduced scale, and there were even prospects of winter play on the French Riviera. An advertisement by the *Menton Syndicat des Hoteliers* assured readers 'The Season 1914-15 will be quiet and "Germanless", an old-fashioned Mentone Season with Croquet, Tennis and Golf as usual'.

During the first year of the war, the correspondence columns of the *Gazette* focused on two issues: the propriety of tournament play at home while the armed forces were locked in mortal combat overseas and the CA Council's decision to hold the ordinary Associate's subscription for 1915 at £1, even though there were no plans to hold the usual official fixtures and the *Gazette* was to appear less frequently.

"The Season 1914-1915 will be quiet and 'Germanless'... with Croquet, Tennis and Golf as usual"

On the cancellation of calendar fixtures, E.L.W. wrote in the 17 September 1914 issue 'that a game of croquet at this time does more good than usual to us who have to stay at home', while B.M. Gatehouse countered 'How anyone calling themselves British can think or talk of playing in croquet tournaments while our kith and kin are fighting in this terrific struggle is incomprehensible'.

Defending the CA's subscription policy in the 28 January 1915 issue, Lord Doneraile, Hon Treasurer, was uncompromising: 'In the first place, the Subscription of Associates is fixed by the Rules of the Association and is not liable to variation on account of circumstances or expedience... In the second place, the number of Tournaments on the Calendar has not a direct bearing on the question... In the third place, a reduction in the number of issues of the *Gazette*, after the conclusion of the current volume, will not necessarily imply any large saving of expenditure...' But prophetically, as we shall see, A.C. Holland was unconvinced: 'In the face of the improbability of there being any Calendar fixtures for 1915 would it not be politic to dry dock the Croquet Association by reducing members' subscriptions to a nominal 2/6 and the issues of the *Gazette* to once a month? ... By this means a wholesale resignation of members would be avoided, and the following of the game preserved.'

As the war continued with no end in sight, the *Gazette* assumed a lower gear. It appeared irregularly and

shrank in size, the newsprint deteriorated, and it made grimmer reading.

The roll of honour, military and naval appointments of Associates ('Croquet Players and the War'), military honours for croquet players, and appeals by a plethora of wartime charities became regular features. The first Associate to lose his life in action was apparently Capt R.Y. Sidebottom of the Lancashire Fusiliers. He was reported in the 10 September 1914 issue as having been wounded, and on 1 April 1915 as having been listed unofficially as killed. The roll of honour lengthened inexorably. The final roll, which appeared in the 5 December 1918 issue, named 18 Associates.

The lists of those who served and died in the armed forces cast the social structure of the contemporary croquet community in sharp focus. Of the 179 Associates reported as serving in the armed forces in September 1916, 93 per cent were of officer rank, as were 17 of the 18 who were killed in the war. There could be no clearer evidence that croquet was almost exclusively the preserve of the middle and upper classes.

Though the CA abandoned official tournament play soon after war broke out, most clubs continued to function as best they could throughout the war and a few of the larger clubs held open tournaments that were advertised and reported in the *Gazette*. And C.D. Locock continued in his role as CA Handicapper, albeit on a reduced honorarium, publishing handicap changes. On the home front players were thin on the ground, and a number of clubs touted for visitors to help augment their numbers and justify the facilities they had preserved. Much like old soldiers, croquet clubs do not die, or at least their deaths are not reported at the time. They only fade away. Of the 165 registered clubs in the British Isles listed in the 1915 edition of *The Croquet Association Year Book*, 28 are missing from the first (1920) post-war edition.

Taking a wider view, croquet seems to have weathered the war years with extraordinary resilience. The National Roque Association of America held its annual open championships at Norwich, CT, continuously throughout the war, and the Victorian Croquet Association and All-Ireland Croquet Association did likewise at least until 1916. I have not been able to piece together precisely what was happening Down Under, but it is clear that Australian croquet was making great advances.

In a letter to the *Gazette* of 18 October 1917, Macpherson Robertson, who later founded the MacRobertson Shield series, told the world how he had just accomplished a 'primary septuple peel' (i.e. peeling one's partner ball through the first seven hoops in a single turn) in practice. And the very fortunes of war must have introduced countless new players to the game. In particular, we see that croquet was widely adopted at home and abroad as a recreation by servicemen behind the front lines. The *Gazette* published a number of letters from military convalescent hospitals, appealing for spare croquet equipment and clothing.



Soldiers playing croquet under a large banyan tree (Vietnamese postcard circa 1905, courtesy of Allen Scheuch)



Wounded Canadians playing croquet, circa 1915 (courtesy of Allen Scheuch)

Taking stock of the impact the war had on croquet as a competitive sport, it is hard to resist the conclusion that the game suffered a major long-term setback, at least in this country, and, had it not been for the war, might even now be in a much stronger position. Membership of the CA peaked at 2,310 in 1910, levelled out at about 2,300 towards the start of WW1, plummeted to 1,457 in 1919, and declined still further on the approach of WW2. But it was perhaps not so much the war itself that hit the game as the policy adopted by the CA Council in response to it.

“It was perhaps not so much the war itself that hit the game as the policy adopted by the CA Council in response”

Standing by the established rule of the Association that Associates were required to pay subscription arrears in full, it alienated about a third of the Association's membership. It makes little sense to speculate on what might be the state of the game today had it been otherwise, but it is a fair bet that it would occupy a significantly higher position in the league of minority sports.

With the benefit of the experience of WW1, on the outbreak of WW2 the CA promptly battened down the hatches. All calendar fixtures were abandoned 'for the duration'; the annual subscription of £1 was replaced by a single War-time subscription of 10s; and an ad hoc caucus of the Council, those members who fortuitously lived in the South West ('The Devon Committee'), ran the shop as best they could. The CA Gazette was published just once a year. Writing in the first of seven War Emergency

numbers, issued in May 1940, Chairman G.F. Handel Elvey struck a statesmanlike note that all could endorse: '... while endeavouring to bear cheerfully such burdens as are laid upon us, and making whatever contribution we are able to the national effort, for the rest we can adopt the principle of "business as usual", and try to keep normal activities going, in the hope that, black as it may be, the war-cloud will pass and the blessing of Peace may return.'

Club News became a regular feature of the Gazette. As year followed year, the clubs struggled for survival against mounting odds. Whole grounds were requisitioned by government to aid the war effort, club buildings were destroyed by enemy action, courts were put under the plough to Grow for Victory, supplies of croquet balls dried up, court maintenance suffered owing to shortages of fuel and labour, and attendance at club events declined owing to transport difficulties.

The Gazette for 1944 contained reports from 20 clubs. Most struck a restrained upbeat note, but the writing was plainly on the wall. The Carlisle club had closed down 'owing to a very decreased membership'; Guildford was being 'disbanded owing to there being very few players available'; and there was concern at Surbiton that, owing to the dearth of new members, 'eventually the Club must die out'.

But these 20 reports were no more than the tip of the iceberg. Beneath the waves, the situation was presumably even more dire. It was estimated that the number of CA Associates had dropped from 1,291 in 1939 to no more than 500-600 in November 1945; and of the 99 British clubs listed in the 1939 Croquet Association Year Book, only 40 were listed in the next (1947) edition. The war had dealt the CA a savage blow: it was not until 40 years later that membership levels regained their pre-war strength. And the picture worldwide was seemingly no brighter. The National Roque Association of America cancelled its annual championships during the years 1942-45, and

never regained its pre-war vitality.

What do we learn from these events about the long-term viability of a game that has seen such amazing ups and downs since its beginnings some 150 years ago? We may be on the up right now, but what resources do we have to withstand any future international cataclysm? The impression I am left with justifies guarded optimism. Though, as we have seen, the higher reaches of the game and the governing bodies that support it are quick to suffer from national emergency and very slow to recover, croquet is so deeply embedded in our culture that we need have little fear for its future.

Even in the throes of WW2, we see that the spirit of croquet shines through the darkness - sometimes in the most unlikely places, sometimes leaving bright patches, which may have a profound influence on the future development of the game. Writing in the Victory number of the Gazette, 'VJ (7)', at the end of the war, Robert Tingey reported that croquet had been played continuously throughout the war at the Gezira Sporting Club, Cairo. Visiting members of the British armed forces, including a few A class players, seized the opportunity to hone their playing skills, and did much to raise the level of club play. Owing to the fluctuating number of players, Russian, French, and Golf Croquet were especially popular. I have not been able to discover how the Egyptian game developed in the immediate post-war years, but it could well be that the wartime influx of CA Associates in uniform sowed the seeds that gave rise to the supremacy of Egyptian players in Golf Croquet.

If Golf Croquet should prove influential in raising the profile of croquet in general, future historians may justly point to the war as the original cause. And if roque had not lost its momentum after the war, the movement that led to the foundation of the United States Croquet Association may never have got under way. 'Tis an ill wind that blows nobody any good.

Cover Story - Leeds Castle, Kent

Report by Jeremy Hackett (Medway CC)



Medway CC have now completed a very enjoyable first season working in partnership with the Trustees of Leeds Castle, with the joint objectives of entertaining visitors and showing them croquet at first hand.

About seven miles east of Maidstone, Leeds Castle claims to be 'The Loveliest Castle in the World' with some justification, as readers who've visited or seen the London Underground adverts may well agree.

The Norman Castle and Gate House are set on an island surrounded by a large moat, which in turn is surrounded by parkland, including a nine-hole Golf Course. On a summer's evening, as the last visitors disappear, a wonderful tranquillity descends and the many birds gather around the edges of the moat. Sitting under the large cedar trees on the island and looking across the croquet lawn with the front of the Castle golden in the setting sun, one doesn't mind how long one's opponent takes trying to put together a four-ball break, especially if one has a drink to hand.

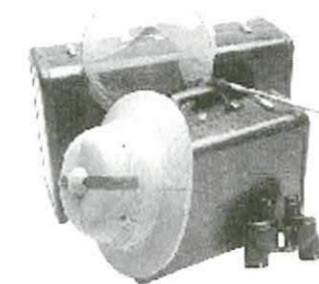
From the writer's point of view, this is rather like coming home, as some 45 years ago I went to nearby Sutton Valence School. I only returned to live in Kent and join Medway CC just over three years ago. In the 1960's the Castle was privately owned by Lady Bailie who kindly extended the courtesy of the Golf Course to staff and students of Sutton Valence, and I well remember several hooked drives feeding the fish!

The reunion came about via an old Housemate at SV through whom I was introduced to the Special Events Manager, Richard Millward, who soon showed deadly intent at Golf Croquet. So Medway CC led a series of Golf Croquet introduction evenings for Castle Staff and Friends, as well as playing three of our SECF Golf League matches at our second home ground of Leeds Castle. The lawn is in fact an oval, between the Gate House and the Castle, but big enough to rope off a full sized 'square'. The surface is fast, being maintained by the Golf Course green-keepers, with one or two challenging borrows! Nevertheless Medway members and all our opponents have thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. More importantly the Castle have had very positive feedback from visitors, who, after some very basic tuition, could play three generous garden quality hoops at the end of the main lawn.

Special events were also held, culminating in the September Balloon and Vintage Car Weekend. Unfortunately the weather was poor, but we were invited to the Press Shoot some ten days previously. Four Medway

CC members, Peter Highton (Chairman), Geoff Elliott, Marilyn Murray (all depicted on the cover) and the writer reported at 6 a.m. in full whites, but visibility was down to about 50 metres. Within two hours it turned out to be a glorious autumn day. As the mist slowly lifted the Castle magically emerged like an ocean liner across the water. The four of us then helped get some of the ten balloons inflated before rushing round to take up position on the croquet lawn. The pilots all had instructions to 'shoot' the croquet players hoping to get the ultimate photo of croquet with Castle and moat. However hot air balloons have no real steering and the gentle breeze had other ideas, so the cover shot was taken at ground level! As my wife says of the family album 'Why are you never in any of the photos? - but someone has to act as cameraman!

Anyhow, on the actual day we did identify six potential new Medway members, also a family of grandfather (Bowls player with wrecked knee), father and two boys who promised to contact Crawley CC, handed out SECF literature, and were briefly seen on local TV. Quote of the weekend? An American, of course, who on emerging from the Castle announced "Gee Mavis, they are playing Bowls with hammers". Maybe we should have re-directed him to Palm Beach in Florida!



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9th WCF World Championships

Ireland impress, but Fulford regains the Champion's crown

Reg Bamford's dominance of the game over the last couple of years was kept in check at the 9th World Championships, as Robert Fulford took the title.

This was the first time the Championship had been held in New Zealand, and the event took place at venues around the Wellington area during the first week of December. Notionally, this is midsummer for New Zealand, though the Championship - at least in its later stages - was dogged by heavy downpours of rain, and difficult, slow lawns were the inevitable result. Using Wellington's main club at Kelburn as the principal base for the tournament, the semi-finals could not be started, and all players had to decamp up the east coast to Waimarie. The following day Kelburn was still waterlogged, and the final was also relocated, this time to lawns at Paraparaumu.

The event attracted 64 players from around the world. 12 players represented England - Chris Clarke, Phil Cordingley, Ed Duckworth, Robert Fulford, John Gibbons, David Goacher, Jerry Guest, Michael Heap, David Maugham, Dave Mundy, David Openshaw and Pete Trimmer. Wales was represented by Chris Williams, and Scotland by Keith Aiton. The remaining places were taken by 20 New Zealanders, nine Australians, six from each of the USA and Ireland, two Egyptians, and one from each of Belgium, South Africa, Germany, Canada, Japan, Spain and the Isle of Man.

Play for the first three days required competitors to play each of the other seven within blocks of eight. The top four within each block went on to play in the knockout play-offs to decide the eventual champion. Of the British players, ten of the English (all bar Gibbons and Heap), along with Aiton proceeded to the knockout stage.

The fall of Bamford

Coming into this event as odds-on favourite, it's a measure of Reg Bamford's contribution to the game that there's such surprise that he could even lose a single game. Even though Toby Garrison is the top New Zealand player, ranked sixth in the world and playing at his home club, his meeting with Bamford showed a remarkable comeback against the World Number One.

Bamford took the first game in the best-of-three match with little resistance. He'd planned a sextuple leave (crosswire at one, and lay-up in corner 3), but failed to get his opponent wired. The leave was aborted and he continued to 4-back, chancing a shorter shot for Garrison. Garrison missed and Bamford finished easily.

Bamford again took the early initiative in the second game, this time getting decent position on his leave, allowing him to stop at 1-back with a 30 yard shot for Garrison. Toby hit, made hoop one and was hampered.

Bamford hit, and again found a wired position for his opponent. Garrison again hit the long shot, and

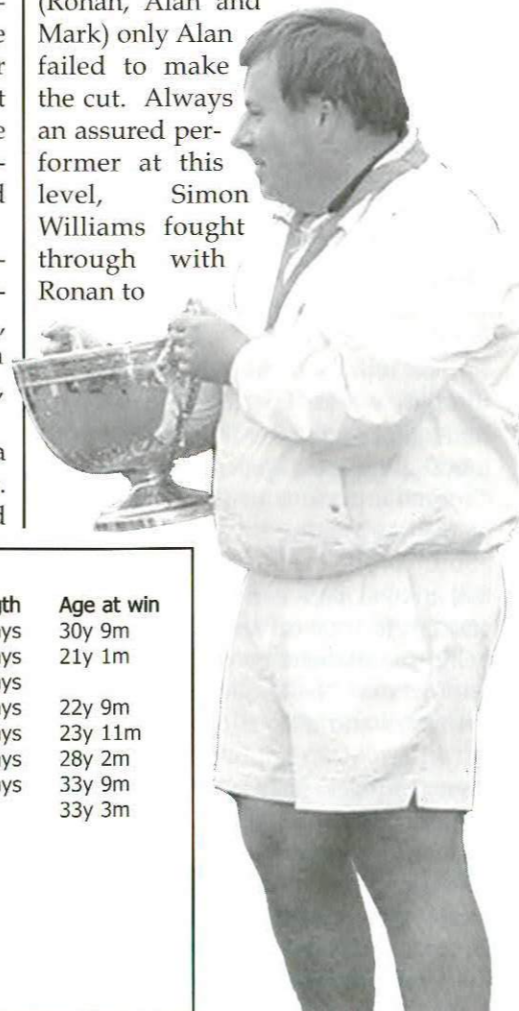
this time proceeded to 4-back. Both players missed in turn, and Reg eventually got back in. Now he too found himself hampered after hoop one, letting Toby return to play.

Garrison played a difficult turn, first leaving himself having to jump over a redundant ball to make a roquet, and then wiring himself on his target. Only with a certain amount of improvisation could he complete his turn and level the match.

Having the upper hand in the third game, the New Zealander provided local spectators with a popular victory, despatching the title holder from the event and assuring himself of a path through to the final.

Irish success

With six players competing in this year's Championship, the Irish contingent looked particularly strong. Of the three McInerney brothers (Ronan, Alan and Mark) only Alan failed to make the cut. Always an assured performer at this level, Simon Williams fought through with Ronan to



Left: Andrew Johnston executes a hammer shot on his way to the semi-final
Top right: Toby Garrison (right) and his beaten opponent, World No 1 Reg Bamford
Bottom right: Plate Finalists Steve Meatheringham and John Gibbons
Opposite page: WCF World Champion Robert Fulford

reach the quarterfinals. Each had overcome a New Zealand legend in the previous round - Joe Hogan, the first World Champion, and John Prince, one of World Croquet's greatest exponents.

Less predictable, certainly, was the progress of the relatively unknown Andrew Johnston. Johnston came through the qualifiers with a ranking some way outside the top 100. Taking notable scalps in each round, he eventually fell to Garrison in the semifinal in what were, by then, very testing weather conditions.

The final

This was Garrison's first World Championship Final. For Fulford it was his seventh. Having relocated to Paraparaumu, lawns were much more easily paced than they had been, and gaining the innings was critical. And so it proved, with Fulford starting his assault in Game 1 by approaching the first hoop from somewhere near the fourth corner, running the hoop from four yards, and soon leaving Garrison two games down, without a single roquet made by the local player.

Garrison finally got in in the third

game, though not until Fulford had already made a successful break round. Robert missed, allowing Toby to hold on to the innings and win his only game of the final.

The fourth game saw Toby take the first break, but come to grief with a faulted stroke at hoop two. Robert regained the initiative, and Toby failed to take croquet again for the rest of the match.

This marked an impressive fifth World Champion title for Robert Fulford. He has now been reigning World Champion for longer than all other holders collectively (see table opposite). He has contested every final of the event since 1992, and although Reg Bamford now occupies the World Number One position, there's still little sign of Fulford's powers slipping at all over the last decade.

As for the rest of the competitors, England continues to show great strength in depth. John Gibbons, one of the two Englishmen entering the consolation event at the first stage, went on to win that title.

This was Ireland's best showing yet in the Worlds. Sustained development there will surely bring great news for competitive croquet.

Knockout results

First Round

Reg Bamford (SA) bt Peter Batchelor (NZ) -25, +25sxp, +25; Toby Garrison (NZ) bt Jerry Guest (E) +25tp, +26tp; Bob Jackson (NZ) bt Curtis Drake (USA) +25tp, +26; Phil Cordingley (E) bt Mark McInerney (I) -17, +25tp, +17tp; Joe Hogan (NZ) bt Bruce Fleming (A) +16stp, +26; Ronan McInerney (I) bt Peter Trimmer (E) +17tp, +21tp; Dennis Bulloch (NZ) bt Stephen Forster (A) +23, -23, +10; Andrew Johnston (I) bt David Goacher (E) -26tp, +15, +17; Robert Fulford (E) bt Jocelyn Sutton (A) +17, +26tp; David Openshaw (E) bt Jerry Stark (USA) +5, +8tp; Chris Clarke (E) bt Trevor Bassett (A) +26tp, +26; Martin Clarke (A) bt Ed Duckworth (E) +8, -26tp, +16; David Maugham (E) bt Paul Skinley (NZ) +26tp, -4, +26; Brian Wislang (NZ) bt Dave Mundy (E) +15, +13; John Prince (NZ) bt Keith Aiton (S) +11, -26, +15tp; Simon Williams (I) bt Bruce Baker (NZ) +20tp, +6

Second Round

Garrison bt Bamford -26tp, +19tp, +20tp; Jackson bt Cordingley +6, +24; R McInerney bt Hogan +17tp, +26tp; Johnston bt Bulloch +16, +26; Fulford bt Openshaw +26tp, +17tp; C Clarke bt M Clarke +13, +25tp; Wislang bt Maugham +11, -26tp, +23; Williams bt Prince +24tp, +1

Quarterfinals

Garrison bt Jackson +6tp, +24; Johnston bt R McInerney +8tp, -17tp, +24; Fulford bt C Clarke -26tp, +26tp, +16tp; Wislang bt Williams +26tp, -26tp, +16

Semifinals

Garrison bt Johnston +25, +8tp, -5tp, +4tp; Fulford bt Wislang +26tp, +26tp, +10tpo

Final

Fulford bt Garrison +26tp, +26tp, -17tp, +15tp

Plate Final

John Gibbons (E) bt Steve Meatheringham (A) +20, +5

World Croquet Federation World Champions

	Venue	Reign	Length	Age at win
Joe Hogan (NZ)	Hurlingham, UK	23 Jul 1989 - 9 Sep 1990	413 days	30y 9m
Robert Fulford (E)	Hurlingham, UK	9 Sep 1990 - 15 Sep 1991	371 days	21y 1m
John Walters (E)	Hurlingham, UK	15 Sep 1991 - 31 May 1992	259 days	
Robert Fulford (E)	Newport, US & Carden Park, UK	31 May 1992 - 17 Jun 1995	1,112 days	22y 9m
Chris Clarke (E)	Fontenay-le-Comte, France	17 Jun 1995 - 16 Nov 1997	883 days	23y 11m
Robert Fulford (E)	Bunbury, Australia	16 Nov 1997 - 8 Jul 2001	1,330 days	28y 2m
Reg Bamford (SA)	Hurlingham, UK	8 Jul 2001 - 8 Dec 2002	518 days	33y 9m
Robert Fulford (E)	Wellington, NZ	8 Dec 2002 -		33y 3m

Total time as World Champion (to Jan 1 2003)

Joe Hogan	413 days
Robert Fulford	2,836 days
John Walters	259 days
Chris Clarke	883 days
Reg Bamford	518 days



News & Information

...and on the subject of cakes

The cover of the last issue has provoked much interest. Owen Bryce, newly appointed last month as Chairman of Northampton CC at the age of 82, received the birthday cake pictured below two years ago. Croquet, it seems, is fertile ground for cake decorators everywhere.



Golf Croquet Coaching

Would you like to give real encouragement to the Golf Croquet players in your Club? Why not consider becoming a qualified Golf Croquet Coach?

Start by becoming aware of the techniques for teaching Golf Croquet and come on a specially designed weekend course, to be held at Edgbaston Croquet Club on 12-13 April 2003. Details are available in the CA Fixtures Calendar for 2003. You can also contact Jennet Blake on 01865 882838 for further information.

Members Vouchers for the CA Shop

As part of the CA's drive to encourage more players to become Associates, we have been reviewing members' benefits, with a view to making membership as attractive as possible. One initiative coming out of this is to formalise the discounts members may obtain from pur-

chases at the Croquet Association shop. In the past, members have been given discounts on a discretionary basis, depending on what is ordered.

For 2003, all members will be issued with discount vouchers. These will entitle members to 10% off their first purchase of selected items, including all books, croquet sets and selected mallets. Look out for your vouchers, which will be included in your membership pack, along with your membership card.

In practice, presentation of the physical vouchers is not essential, as any discount claimed will be marked off against a membership list, so that presenting the voucher will not be necessary. However, you will need to indicate that you wish to use your voucher, and not save it for a later purchase.

We hope this will be a clearer system for everyone as to what discount they may expect. However, some additional discounts may be possible for members, particularly if buying in quantity, so don't be afraid to ask!

Erratum

The South East Croquet Federation has altered the date of its improvers' coaching course (handicap 18+) to April 26/27 at Southwick, not April 19/20 as advertised in the CA Fixtures Book.

Issue 282

Concerns have been expressed during the last month about the cartoon which featured on page 6 of the last edition of the Gazette, whose content may have offended some readers.

The Gazette does not exist to annoy or offend its readership, and the Editor apologises for any offence which the inclusion of this item might have caused.

Croquet Holidays & Tournaments Abroad

By the time you read this, a party of 40 players and non players will be travelling to the National Croquet Center (NCC), West Palm Beach Florida for the first Association rules tournament to be played there in early February. Bob Alman of the NCC and Diplomatic Travel, who organised the travel package, were delighted and overwhelmed at the response for this unique trip. UK referees, Kevin Carter and Ian Plummer, (who were quietly confident that this would be a popular event) will be managing the tournament which is hoped will become an annual fixture.

Since launching the tournament it has become apparent that there are many who would like to play croquet while abroad. With this in mind, Diplomatic Travel is working with the NCC to organise small groups to take a 'croquet trail' which will probably comprise a two centre holiday in Florida, with the chance to play three or four games in different clubs while relaxing or sightseeing the area. The NCC is also hosting the MacRobertson Shield in November, and Diplomatic Travel will again be putting together a flexible package for those who wish to play, watch, holiday or do a little of each.

Diplomatic Travel are also specialists in travel to Southern Africa, New Zealand and Australia. If you are considering travelling to the Western Province tournament in March, why not let Diplomatic Travel make your travel arrangements? Extensions can be arranged - for example a safari, battlefield tour or trip along the garden route.

If you are interested in travelling to the tournaments mentioned above, playing croquet while on abroad, or indeed taking a holiday in general please contact us - we'd be delighted to help! Address details are on Page 19.

CA CLUB CONFERENCES

All CA members are invited to two Club Conferences being held in 2003 at -
Cheltenham on Sunday 9th March at the Thistle Cheltenham Hotel starting at 11.30 am.
Huddersfield on Saturday 29th March at the Cedar Court Hotel starting at 11.30 am.
 See below for details of venues. Lunch will be available.

We are delighted that donations to the President's Appeal mean that funds are now available to continue developing croquet. John Solomon suggested this would be a good time for the CA to invite delegates from clubs and Federations to discuss new initiatives:

- ♦ What additional help do Federations and clubs want from the CA?
- ♦ What should our development priorities be:
 existing small, medium or large Member Clubs? Start-up clubs?
- ♦ What are the most effective contributions that Regional Officers (paid by the CA) could make?
- ♦ How best can the CA provide development and coaching help? Can the existing links between Federations and CA committees be improved?
- ♦ Funding the CA from subscriptions and the tournament levy: is there a better way?

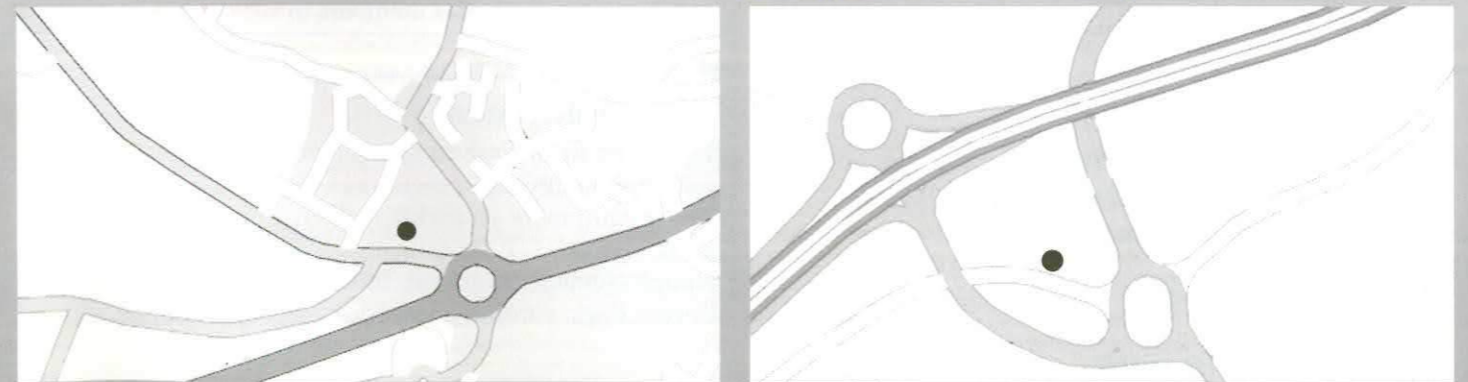
Council members want to hear your views on these and any other policy issues. The CA will take them into account when compiling its Strategic Development Plan.

CA committee members will be present to advise clubs about, in particular -

- Recruitment and retention of members
- Handicapping
- Coaching
- Tax breaks for clubs
- Child protection policies

The Thistle Cheltenham Hotel (tel 0870 333 9131) is on Gloucester Rd, 2.5 miles west of Cheltenham centre. From the M5: exit at junction 11 and take the A40 towards Cheltenham. Hotel sign is in about 1 mile at first roundabout. From Cheltenham: take A40 towards Gloucester. Nearest railway station: Cheltenham Spa (1.5 miles by taxi).

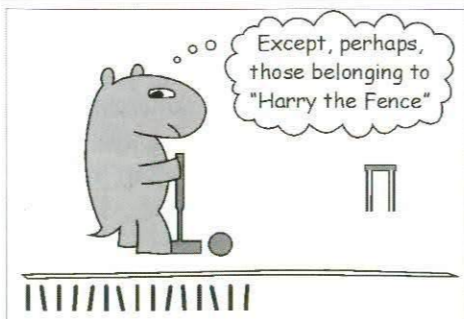
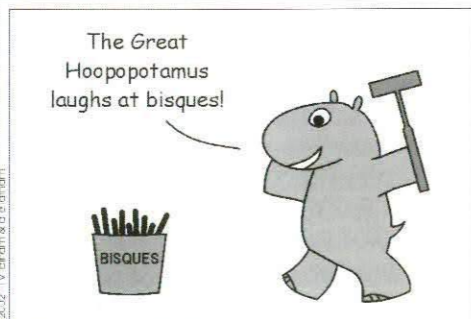
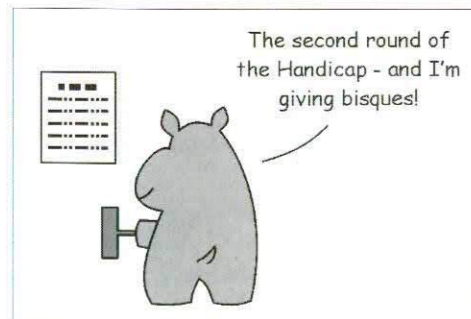
The Cedar Court Hotel at Huddersfield (tel 01422 375431) is just off the M62, mid-way between Leeds and Manchester: exit at junction 24. From the M62 eastbound: at the roundabout take the 3rd exit following the road under the motorway to another roundabout. Take the first exit (signposted Rochdale); the hotel is 50m on the right. From the M62 westbound: at the roundabout take the 1st exit (signposted Rochdale). Nearest railway station: Huddersfield (15 mins by taxi).



COME AND HAVE YOUR SAY

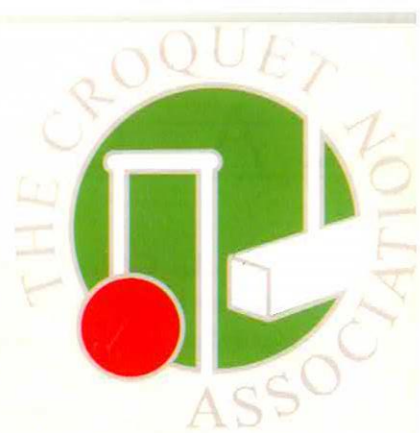
HOOPOTAMUS

by Victor



CROQUET SHOP

Expert advice, discounted prices, rapid delivery on most items



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Now selling a comprehensive selection of mallets, including **Pidcock**, **Percival** and **Hobbs** mallets, as well as the **Hogan**, **Jaques** and **Townsend** mallets we have always sold. The popular Hogan mallet at £68 + delivery is still our best-seller. Come to us for the widest variety and impartial expert advice.

Mallet Covers

A range of soft mallet covers to suit most mallets, including both padded and unpadded.

Jaques grey cover with red 'Jaques' on side	£16.00
Blue cover with Croquet logo	£19.00
Jaques green 'de-luxe' cover	£21.00
Padded blue cover with croquet logo.	£23.00
Padded blue cover for longer mallet head lengths	£27.00

Please add £1.50 for p&p

Clothing

A wide range of white clothing and wet weather gear is available, including:



Breathable wet weather jacket	£33.00
Breathable jacket and trousers	£46.00
Fleece reversible windcheater jacket	£35.00
Fleece reversible gilet	£27.00
Wet weather 'bomber' jacket	£33.00
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Pullover	£18.50
Ladies cardigan	£28.00

Please add £4.00 p&p.

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A range of silver jewellery, including:



Tie clip (mallet and balls)	£12.50
Brooch (mallet and ball)	£17.00
Earrings (hoop and ball), screw-on or pierced	£12.00

Please add £1 p&p

For more information

Call Jeff Dawson on 01483 776971

Or Email sales@croquet.org.uk

Or visit our website

www.croquet.org.uk/shop

We are based at:

112 Potters Lane, Send, Surrey

GU23 7AL

Callers welcome by appointment only, please

Odds and Ends

Timer	£8.00
Croquet Girl cards - pack of 8, blank inside	£4.50
Croquet posters - b&w prints, 4 designs available	£6.00ea
Ball markers, pack of 10 assorted plastic markers	£1.00
Ball marker plastic holder, with 4 markers	£1.00

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A wide variety of croquet publications are available, including:



The Laws of Association Croquet	4.00
The Laws of Golf Croquet	£2.00
A Guide to Golf Croquet	£5.00
Know the game	£5.00
Croquet - The Skills of the Game by Bill Lamb	£10.00
Croquet by John Solomon	£9.00
Plus One on Time by Don Gaunt	£10.00
Expert Croquet Tactics by Keith Wylie	£14.00
Croquet Management by Gaunt & Wheeler	£11.50
Croquet Coaching Manual	£11.50
The Principles of Handicapping by Bill Lamb	£2.50
Challenge & Gilbey book by Alan Oldham	£3.00
Lawn Management by John Beech	£2.00
Croquet: Technique by John Riches	£7.00
Croquet: Error Correction by John Riches	£7.00
Croquet: Next Break Strategy by John Riches	£9.00
Croquet: The Mental Approach by John Riches	£9.00
Croquet: Lessons in Tactics by John Riches	£9.00
Croquet: Finer Points by John Riches	£10.50

All book prices include P&P to UK addresses

Complete croquet sets

How about getting a set for the back garden? We sell a wide range of sets at rock bottom prices, and our new voucher scheme entitles members to **10% discount** on their first set!

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This is an ideal time to check over your club equipment, and replace any equipment necessary. As always, we sell all the equipment your club is likely to need, including:

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Hoops - Omega, Aldridge, Townsend and Jaques

Corner flags, yardline markers, pegs, clips, gauges.