



THE CROQUET GAZETTE

ISSUE 285 - MAY 2003

Florida in February

*The UK's first taste
of winter croquet*



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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

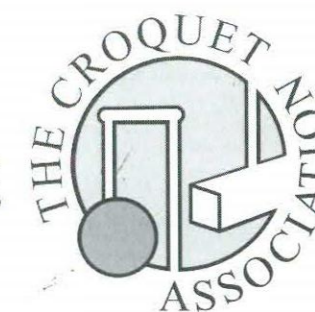
Queries regarding delivery of the Gazette to members should be directed to the Secretary of the Croquet Association and not to the Editor.

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

ISSUE 285 - MAY 2003



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Cover photograph by Samir Patel:

Mike Jenner of Chicago Croquet Club lines up his peg-out to the February tournament at Florida's National Croquet Center.

Visit the Croquet Association website at www.croquet.org.uk

Chairman's Column



Council membership

I shall be adjusting to life without croquet meetings this autumn as I am not seeking re-election to Council. Which reminds me that now is the time of year to encourage Associates to become Council members and con-

tribute to the work of our committees. You need a proposer, a seconder and to write to the Secretary by 1st June. Please do consider helping to manage croquet affairs nationally if you think you can offer relevant experience and skills.

A busy time . . .

The early months of 2003 were busy times for many Council members. Our President, John Solomon, suggested that this would be a good time for club members to hear what Council and its committees were planning to do. More importantly, members could react to these ideas and also tell Council about anything else that needed its attention.

We organised major conferences at Cheltenham and Huddersfield, and were also able to hold two mini-conferences attached to the AGMs of the

South East and the East Anglian Federations. My thanks to all those who helped to stage these events. The feedback I have had from the 60 or so clubs represented at all the meetings has been very good and I am sure this consultation exercise has been worthwhile.

Now Council needs to ensure that our committees take suitable actions. Some matters will need further debate, some we can act on in the next few months - and some we have already put in hand (how about that!). My report on the ground we covered follows. If you have views and want to tell me about them, by all means do - but if you see me at a tournament this summer kindly wait until I'm in the bar.

Quiller

The Nobody Inn The CA's new wine partner!

The CA Wine Society started in conjunction with Folio Direct in 2002. Their parent company has decided to sell the business to The Wine Company who will be taking over from 1st May 2003.

We have discussed the CA's involvement with the new owners and I am pleased to be able to announce that the Wine Company will be pleased to work with the CA on terms similar to those of Folio Direct.

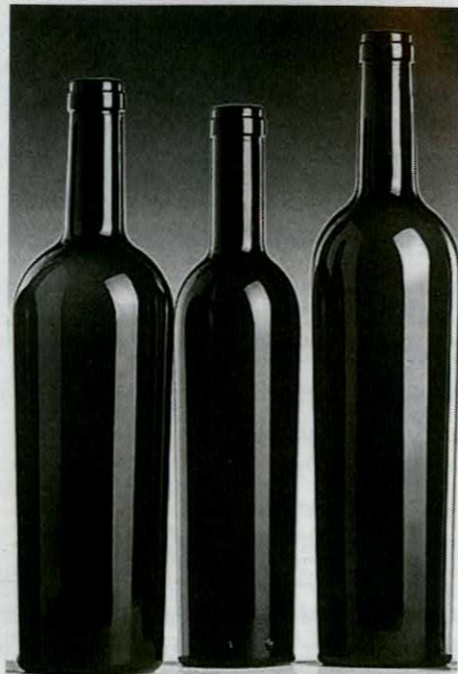
The Wine Company was created as an extension to that superb Dartmoor hostelry - The Nobody Inn. They have been selling wines by mail order for over 20 years and have now created the Wine Company as an extension to this activity.

They will be enclosing a small, interesting list in the Croquet Gazette four times a year. In addition you will be free

to order wines from them at any time of the year. In addition you will have the opportunity to purchase from the somewhat larger Nobody list, described by some as quirky, and unbelievable by others!

I am sure you will find The Wine Company to be a friendly and responsive business. When you order wines from them please quote your CA membership number (which is on your latest membership card). This will enable The Wine Company to identify you as a CA member and to donate 5% of the value of these purchases to the CA for re-investment in our sport. Unfortunately at this stage no rebate will be available from the Nobody Inn list but all purchases from the Wine Company's list will count.

You can order by phone or email. The details will be on the list enclosed with this copy of the Gazette.



Alan and Margaret's story

My daughter asked me the other day

“Dad, what did you do when you wanted to put some money aside for the future?”

to which I replied

“When I was about your age, I put some money into an investment - a unit trust. I invested a little every month and I didn't even miss it.”

Now that I'm coming up to retirement, I'm happy that I've got extra money set aside. After all, you never know when you might need it.

For every investment made with Lincoln by 31 December 2003 you will benefit from a 50% discount on all initial charges.

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future

Letters

The stress of losing

The articles and correspondence on handicap play in recent editions have been very interesting.

Around about 1980, when the Gazette published the results of all games in most week long (and also weekend) tournaments, I did an analysis of a complete season's reported games. I plotted the number of games won against the handicap difference and the result was a nearly straight line. The bigger the handicap difference the greater the certainty that the lower handicapped player would win.

The conclusion I came to was that for the handicap system to be fair the higher handicapped player really needed something like an extra bisque for every four they held.

The complete change to the present day situation is, I am sure, a by-product of the Automatic Handicapping System. In the old days your handicap went down only if you won events or played exceptionally well, and it only went up if you asked for it to be raised. That system, of course, resulted in too many low handicap players and so, to correct this, one year all handicaps were raised by two bisques, and then a little later all low handicapped players were raised by one bisque - both times

as soon as I got down to -1/2 I was promptly raised to over scratch!

But in those days losing games didn't matter. With the stress of losing handicap points as a result of the AHS, no matter how minor the event, some of the enjoyment has gone out of croquet. It is all too serious these days. That, unfortunately, is the major casualty of automatic handicapping.

I. Howard Wright
Edinburgh

Extreme Croquet

With regard to the article on Extreme Croquet in the March edition (*Croquet Gazette No 284*), the French have been playing this form of the game for even longer than the Yanks - Internet users can find "Le jeu de croquet dauphinois" at croquet.dauphinois.free.fr (there is an English-language option) - they now have a network of players and organisers in different parts of France, as well as outside and some membership from the States, too! Which is perhaps why "our" croquet hasn't made much headway over here.

Alex Jardine
L'Hermenault, France

It's a shame that the last issue's feature had no room to cover each of the Extreme Croquet offshoots to be found in detail on the Internet. Dauphinois Croquet is one of the more appealing. The emphasis on garden planting at the expense of coverage of the game itself makes this rather more of an pleasing pastime than some of Extreme's other manifestations. - Ed

Computer croquet

Does anyone know of any computer software available to play croquet at home on a PC. Surely in this age of computer games, when there are version of golf, tennis, snooker, football and even cricket, available to play on the PC, a version for Croquet that would enable honing up on tactical skills, and allow some of us middle handicap players to play the experts, all be it in virtual reality, would be a great help.

It might even attract newcomers to the game, wishing to swap their mice for mallets.

Can anyone help?

Jim Gillespie
DrJimGillespie@aol.com

There are at least two programs available for armchair croquet players: Kiwi Croquet, a New Zealand creation, and Computer Croquet, developed by Ian Lines of Bowdon. A demo version of the latter is available for download from the Internet. Details of both can be obtained from the 'How to Play' section of Ian Plummer's Oxford Croquet website at www.oxford-croquet.com

Hoop setting

Bill Arliss's article (*Gazette 284*, pp13-15) contains a wealth of valuable advice about the practical problems of setting hoops, and there will be few setters who could not profit from reading it. One is more impressed than ever by those heroes who prepare ten or more courts for a tournament. Most of the work is in moving the hoop positions, but much time must also be spent adjusting and subse-

quently maintaining the hoop widths, and it is worth pointing out that these tasks are made *much* simpler by the use of the Omega adjustable hoops, developed a few years ago, and available for purchase from the CA.

My own experience was that a court could usually be checked and adjusted to within the CA tolerance in five minutes, a great advantage when one wishes to encourage a team of club members to set hoops reliably.

The simple secret is not to use feeler gauges with their need to carry out the tedious process of rolling the ball around in the jaws so as to make sure one is gauging by its maximum diameter, but to use a test bar of length such that when the hoop is adjusted to it, the largest ball on the court will have the desired clearance.

Of course the size of the balls must be known, and my experience with eight sets of Barlow GTs used at Bristol was that about six balls had a maximum diameter of 3.625", and that the smallest value of the maximum diameter among the eight sets was 3.622". Whether this uniformity is typical would need to be confirmed by measurements with vernier callipers, but most modern balls are likely to be as good as this. Balls do need to be checked from time to time, but I have not detected any changes in the balls that I measured about three years ago.

For all normal club play, one test bar is sufficient, but shorter test bars can easily be obtained for tighter hoop settings, or of course masochists can always revert to using feeler gauges.

A further advantage of Omegas is that it is unnecessary to erode the carrot holes by scraping their sides in order to adjust them; their width is adjusted by rotating the carrots, and the holes remain truly conical and tend to grip the adjacent soil firmly, with only a smart tap necessary to make them firm in the ground after any adjustment has been made.

In his comments on the "runnability" of hoops, Bill Arliss points out that other things besides width are involved; this is true enough, but his conclusion that this justifies the



amendment to the Regulations which allows managers, ROTs etc. to set widths as they think fit is dubious (cf. my letter, *Gazette 282*, p6). This is a technical matter which I will pursue elsewhere rather than here, but at least Bill has advanced an argument on which a reasoned discussion can take place.

Don Gugan
Bristol

Vandalism (again)

The photograph above shows the aftermath when vandals broke into our clubhouse at Tyneside Croquet Club recently. The mallets are neatly settled in their final resting place after wreaking devastation throughout the building.

We have been hearing so much about "weapons of mass destruction" recently - we thought we were in the wrong place!

We lost all our crockery, toilet pedestals, cisterns, handbasins, electrics, and so it goes on. The council will make good all the fixtures (eventually) and we will re-equip our kitchen area. The real loss felt by members was the feeling of intrusion

into our haven but the determination of members to rebuild is equally real - we will overcome, in this our club's 20th year.

Derek Watts
Tyneside

A Plea to Gazette Readers

*I labour long and hard
To feed the fickle press.
But need to know
When they will bless
My efforts with a mention.*

*For croquet news when it is sent
I hope someone will respond
And scan the Guardian, Times
Independent or the Mail
To take a note of the event.*

With apologies to poetry lovers everywhere!

If you regularly read one of the above papers please would you contact Pat Francis by any of the usual means. Details are at the front of the Gazette, or by email to:

peterfrancis@waitrose.com



I've been looking for you all day...

Equipment trolleys - the Rolls Royce design

by Mike Lambert

Like many clubs, we at Surbiton have a number of lawns some of which are some distance from the equipment storage hut. We've always just piled a set of hoops and balls into the club wheelbarrow and wheeled it over to a lawn and set it out, usually in the existing holes. As the season rolls past the holes get bigger and bigger and the hoops sink lower and lower and can't be set tight. So last year we started a regime whereby hoops are labelled, and a hoop is only ever set in the same pair of holes.

This requires each hoop to be painted with its lawn, hoop number and back/front orientation, and everyone needs to be signed on to the importance of following the rules. I don't know if everyone is, but anyway the hoops get mixed up in the hut, so we have discussed individual boxes or trolleys for each lawn. I built a prototype box, but with all the hoops, peg, flags, etc, it weighed over 20kg and we thought that some of our members might not enjoy carrying this around the lawn. So I've designed and built prototype trolleys. They are now in use and have been widely praised by those who have used them, so here is a description.



I set the design requirements for the ideal trolley as follows:

- You must be able to wheel it across the lawn without marking the lawn,
- It must carry all the hoops, peg, flags and yard line pegs for one lawn (although not common-stock items like bisques),
- It must have a small footprint as seven will have to be stored in our hut,
- The hoops should be stored on the trolley

in a way that makes each hoop's position on the lawn obvious,

- The trolley must be robust, stable, and comfortable to use.

Other desirable features would be:

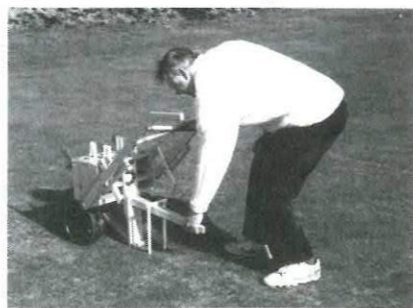
- A provision for carrying sets of balls,
- Somewhere to hang the anti-magpie gratings when setting out the lawn,
- A device for lifting stuck hoops when clearing the lawn.

Its appearance is pretty obvious from the photograph: a set of three horizontal plates in a box construction mounted above a pair of golf trolley wheels, and with two folding handles.

The top two plates have holes cut in them in which the hoops and other items stand, the positions of the hoops mirroring their layout on the lawn. As you stand behind the trolley holding the handles, the layout is as you would see the set-out lawn from A-baulk. The hoops are angled outwards a fraction so they can't clang against each other. The bottom plate also has a hole for the peg, which sits lower on the trolley.

The handles are mounted on the box sides and fold up for storage and down for use. At the front of the trolley are a pair of brackets which can accommodate two racks of balls, and which also fold up when the trolley is stored away. There are also hooks for the lawn gratings.

The leg design incorporates a knuckle which acts as a fulcrum for a lever piece (also accommodated on the top plate) - this is the hoop lifter. The leg is stayed to the trolley wheel axle to eliminate juddering. This stay also supports the bottom of the peg - this allows the peg to sit low enough for the handle cross rail to clear the peg extension when the handles are folded back. The leg has the lawn number painted on it, writ large.



In the first design there was a small step for your foot at ground level, but we have since replaced this with a large plate because the leg was digging into the lawn

when hoops were being levered out of the ground.

The handles are held in their up and down positions by fat dowels moving in sliders. In both the walking and upright positions of the handles the dowel levers are perpendicular to them, so the handles in these positions are rigid. In the upright position the cross rail is more or less above the centre of gravity of the loaded trolley, so it does not swing too much when being lifted by its crossrail.

A lot of trial and error has gone into getting the dimensions right. It is a very upright design with the load high over a small base, so the stability is quite critical. So also are the dimensions of the ball carrier brackets - they allow one set of balls to sit on the edge of the top plate while another hangs beneath from its top dowel. These govern the width of the top plate - four balls' widths less a few millimetres.

The golf trolley wheels (which have their own bearings and simply slide onto a 12mm round bar and secured with wing bolts) came direct from the manufacturer, Tatra Plastics in Stevenage (www.tatra.co.uk), who delivered in three days. The axles are of mild steel from a local metal stockholder.

Our pre-prototype is all built of scrap wood, and has needed running repairs already, but I have since built a proper prototype in good quality pine (the trolley in the photos), which is standing up well. While they have been widely welcomed, several people have muttered darkly of 'too many moving parts' and 'why don't you turn the handles round and make it like a sack trolley', so I have built another similar trolley (number 3!) on this principle. While it is undoubtedly more rigid, it is much heavier when pushed as the load is no longer over the wheels. So we will keep both designs going and decide which to opt for later in the season. All comments from members and visitors welcome!

These trolleys are not an evening's work to make, neither are they particularly cheap (about £50 each including the wheels), but they are my best Rolls Royce design. If they can be kept going for a decade or more they will have been worth it.

I have detailed dimensioned drawings, construction notes and a materials list for the barrow design for anyone who is interested - you can email me on mikejlambert@aol.com.

Golf Croquet Coaching

A report from James Hawkins about the CA's latest GC Coaches' Course

The latest in the CA's Coaching Courses took place at Edgbaston on 11-12 April. In previous courses the intention has been to train individuals in the techniques for coaching Association Croquet, with a view to improving the national infrastructure of club coaches. Here, the objective was to provide a similar course, with the emphasis on appointing club coaches specifically for Golf Croquet.

As Course Director, Michael Hague was vastly experienced in the methods of instruction. As a brigadier, he spent much of his career teaching soldiers how to strip and clean a machine-gun at night in the Guatemalan jungle. The specifics of this experience were, perhaps, of limited application to some, if not most, of the participants in Edgbaston, but the guiding principles were not.

The students themselves comprised a broad cross-section of Golf Croquet players from across the country, coming from as far as Ramsgate and Bowdon. Some of their clubs are dedicated exclusively to Golf, some came as envoys of clubs at which Association is well established, but Golf is in its infancy. Handicaps of those involved spread from 5 down as low as -1.

The essence of good instruction, according to Michael Hague, is to provide the subjects with the maximum physical and mental involvement. So, for the sake of this course, the subject to be taught (namely, Golf Croquet) remains of secondary importance to the methodology of teaching.

The 'set texts' for the weekend were the CA Coaching Committee's *Coaching Manual* (as used for each of these weekend courses, but here adapted to a version suitable for Golf Croquet), and the *Guide to Golf Croquet*, by Jennet Blake and Gerald Mitchell.

In the year since its publication, the *Guide* has become an indispensable reference work for many players, covering most of what a beginner needs to know about tactics and shot production in a readable and clear way. Here we were lucky to have Jennet assisting

in the running of the course. Also at hand were Michael's three deputies, Ron Welch (Ramsgate), Chris Bennett (Edgbaston) and James Hawkins (Southport), who handled much of the practical work for the students.

After the first morning's instruction from Michael, most of the course comprised group work carried out in three syndicates. Whether this consisted of discussion to plan coaching courses, the teaching of tactics, or role playing in an on-lawn coaching session, the objective was to coax the participants themselves into assuming control, and building their own confidence.

For some this came more easily than for others. Several of the students have coached extensively before, and for them the course sought to flesh out their own experience with some rigorous structure. Some had come fresh to coaching, and showed a visible change in their self-confidence over the course of the two days. They each go back to their own clubs newly awarded with the title of CA Club Coach, and a yellow coach's badge.

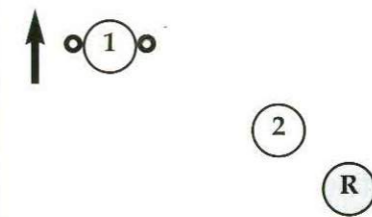
Participants

Maymes Ansell	Herbert Park
Derek Buxton	Ashby
Valerie Harding	Ramsgate
Terje Johansen	Phyllis Court
Allan Laidlaw	Worcester
Mollie McBride	Chester
Harold Niblett	Ramsgate
Jayne Penn-Davis	Edgbaston
June Pheysey-Jones	Thames Valley
Ros Pimlott	Bowdon
Norma Rayne	Thames Valley
Paul Strover	Colchester
Vivian Thomson	Phyllis Court
Patrick Wright	Kenilworth
Sylvia Thomson	Phyllis Court

Directing Staff

Michael Hague (Course Director), Jennet Blake (Administator), Ron Welch, Chris Bennett and James Hawkins.

Golf Croquet Quiz



What should Red do if:

- 1 = Blue, 2 = Yellow
(at Hoop 2);
- 1 = Yellow, 2 = Black
(at Hoop 1);
- 1 = Black, 2 = Blue
(at Hoop 1)?

In each instance, the fourth ball is in a distant corner and has no chance of clearing the other three. Ball 1 is positioned to score on its next turn.

Quiz Answers

i) Red itself cannot dislodge Blue, but can send Yellow beyond the hoop, from where it can send Blue into the distance. Sending Yellow anywhere beyond the hoop is sufficient, so Red should try to catch the Yellow on the left side, and at the same time take position for itself.

ii) Red can send Black to the boundary, level with the hoop, from where it can do little to damage Yellow's prospects of scoring. At the same time, Red can skim off Black's right edge and land close to Hoop 2, without fear of replacement on a penalty spot. Black has no easy shot, and Yellow is then free to run the hoop hard, leaving Red and Yellow as the first two balls at Hoop 2.

iii) Red has no real hope of stopping Black from scoring. Do nothing and Black will run the hoop hard, and reach Hoop 2 first. Sending an early ball to 2 is not an option for Red, as Black can bide its time here and make Red come back on its next turn. Red's best chance is to catch Blue finely in order to nudge Black just through, and get Red up the lawn. Here, where there's no hope of salvaging the Hoop 1 point for himself, Red can at least stop Black getting the advantage at Hoop 2.

Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASCs)

Mick Belcham reports on Tunbridge Wells' experience in seeking tax relief

The Government's CASC initiative offers Sports Clubs the opportunity to become "pseudo-Charities", thereby gaining some potential tax related benefits. However, it limits the Sports Clubs that qualify to those that recruit their members in a non-discriminating way, that are entirely focused on promoting and playing specific sports and that are amateur and non-profit-making. At the end of February, only four Croquet Clubs had been registered. Further information is available on

www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/CASC or by calling the Inland Revenue's Sports Club Unit on (0131) 777 4147.



Preliminaries

Our initial attraction at Tunbridge Wells to the CASC initiative was the apparent potential for "re-defining" all or part of our Annual Subs as Voluntary Donations thereby qualifying for Gift Aid tax benefits. (Other potential tax benefits relating to trading profits, property income, capital gains and interest payments are mostly irrelevant for a club of our size and type)

Preliminary review of Revenue documentation established that we were probably a "good fit" but that we would have to amend some wording in our Constitution before we could fully qualify.

As we had the club's Annual General Meeting in December (about a month after we became aware of the CASC initiative) the Committee decided to use it to get the necessary changes to the Constitution voted through and, if appropriate, to establish a more flexible

Annual Subscription basis that would include some level of Voluntary Donation.

Closer analysis of the Revenue's Guidance Notes however was not encouraging regarding the "Subs versus Donations" issue. While we all recognise that it is not always necessary to follow the Revenue's "advice" explicitly (!!!), it did appear that they were adamant that membership subscriptions would not qualify for Gift Aid - even if they were "dressed up" as donations! A call to the Revenue confirmed this. They said that they were aware of the temptation for Clubs to do this but felt that to allow Clubs to do so would bring the whole Gift Aid concession to Charities into disrepute. By implication: "We'll be watching out for it!"

There's also the issue of "collusion". While we might, as a Committee, decide to adopt a fairly "flexible interpretation" of the Revenue's guidelines, we balked at asking each of our members to do likewise when filing their Tax Returns.

So should we still pursue it? . . .

The Decision

On the face of it, the decision was simplicity itself.

♦ Do we fit?

Yes, broadly.

♦ Would the changes to the Constitution be significant?

No.

♦ What benefits would there be?

Gift Aid for any Donations that we might get.

♦ Are there any disadvantages or constraints?

None.

So we went for it - basically on the assumption that we might, at some time in the future, receive a Donation or Donations sufficient to make it worthwhile.

Implementation

Changes to the Constitution were required in three areas:

Re. Club Objectives: we had to be more explicit about "encouraging our members to learn and participate in the sport of Croquet" (and who could argue against that!)

Re. Membership: we could no longer stipulate that the Committee had the

blanket right to reject a new member's application. Instead we had to incorporate some specific words so that "An application for membership may only be declined (or an existing membership revoked) by the Committee if the membership of the person concerned would be likely, in the view of the Committee, to be contrary to the best interests of the sport or to the good conduct and interests of the Club". This is important for two reasons. Number One: the previous wording was effectively "illegal" - you can't simply reject an application these days because the face doesn't fit. And Number Two: note the "in the view of the Committee". Without that we could be open to legal challenge and interpretation if we were to exclude a member on this basis. With it, it's the Committee's view on whether or not such a situation arises that matters.

Re. Club Dissolution: the Revenue is absolutely insistent that Members should not gain financially from a CASC under any circumstances, even if it folds. So instead of saying that the proceeds of any dissolution would be used as the members saw fit, we have amended it to say that any balance (after discharging liabilities) would be submitted "for donation, by member vote, either to the appropriate governing body for the sport of Croquet (e.g. the Croquet Association) or to a new or existing Croquet Club registered as a Community Amateur Sports Club (CASC)".

The AGM agreed it, the Revenue accepted it and registered us, and now all we are waiting for are the Donations to make it all worthwhile!!

Impacts

On the face of it, a fairly straightforward process. The Revenue was helpful, its documentation self-explanatory and our application was processed and approved in less than a week. But be prepared, as a Committee, to address some pretty interesting questions among yourselves about what your club "is". The Revenue is pretty specific about the kind of clubs it wants to encourage. It insists that clubs are to be "open to the whole community" (meaning non-elitist and non-discriminatory),

"organised on an amateur basis" (meaning non-profit making and ensuring there is no potential financial gain for individual members) and being focused entirely on "promoting participation" in the sport. And that may well mean that there could be a number of clubs that find themselves only "borderline" candidates according to the Revenue's definitions.

The question for Tunbridge Wells now is whether or not we are appropriately focused to take advantage of our CASC registration. Like many clubs we have been a little reticent about actively looking for donations in the past and then only for specific one-off projects. Our Annual Subs are about as high as we can reasonably expect people to pay. And, with a membership of around 40 and three lawns and a clubhouse to maintain, we don't have the critical mass necessary to make the kind of improvements, particularly to the lawns, that we would like and will allow us to grow.

However our registration as a CASC, we believe, provides us with a potential opportunity to re-think our traditional view of Annual Subscriptions and to be more up-front about our intentions for the future and how they will be dependent upon additional funds being available. Our aim is to establish a "dual-level" Annual Subscription - a Maintenance Subscription (effectively to cover the cost of running the Club on a day-to-day basis) and a Development Contribution (to build a "war-chest" to support specific on-going and future development projects). The Maintenance Subscription would be fixed and set either at or marginally below the existing Subscription level (not therefore upsetting the Revenue, we hope). The Development Contribution would be at individual member discretion and would qualify as a Donation for CASC purposes. But, we hope, it would always be seen by members as an integral component of their annual "subscription" - a question of "how much" rather than "whether"!

The key to our achieving this, we believe, is our first identifying - and publishing within the Club - a development plan that clearly demonstrates that the Club has ambitions, is trying to

improve the playing conditions for all members and is an "alive" organisation that is worth joining and supporting. And, to be effective, the plan has to cover a number of years (i.e. it has to be on-going), it has to have a defined target as its objective (i.e. one that members can relate to and see as worthwhile - if not, essential!) and it has to be "up-front" about its total dependence upon additional funding and, therefore, the need to build a "war-chest". If we don't have such a development programme mapped out, how can we expect our "affluent" (and even our not so "affluent") to believe that their largesse would indeed make a difference.

Conclusion

On the face of it, nothing particularly novel or startling. However I can't help but think that, in the long term, this may not simply be an alternative way for the Club to "package" membership subscriptions. Perhaps, more importantly, we should recognise it as a key component of our more ambitious objective for the Club - to enhance that all-important sense of "member ownership". To do so we have to set our sights on moving the Club away from the traditional ethos of "You-pay-us-the-standard-fee-and-we'll-let-you-play-Croquet", and more towards a flexible arrangement in which the emphasis is upon our self-sufficiency as a croquet playing community - a community in which everybody is encouraged to contribute something towards the running of the club, whether it be time, energy, funds, expertise etc. Naturally there will be some that would prefer not to; some that simply want to play their game of croquet and go home. But the essence of cultivating that sense of member ownership, we believe, is to avoid the presumption that everybody falls into that category and, instead, to presume that the majority of members would willingly do their bit if they saw it as all part of the "croquet experience".

Perhaps that's naive! But it sure beats feeling like you're asking favours every time you go looking for a bit of help!

Development News

The 2003 CA Club Conferences - The Way Forward

The report on this year's CA Club Conferences will appear elsewhere in the Gazette, but I am sure that Associates will be interested in the Action Plan that the Development Committee will spearhead in our attempt to fulfil the expressed needs of some clubs as voiced at the conferences.

Firstly, we have written to all Member Clubs, inviting them to complete a questionnaire, indicating the areas in which they would appreciate assistance. When returned and analysed, the various Council Committees will be able to evaluate the size of the task which we will attempt to address. I say 'attempt to address' as it would be foolhardy not to recognise that we no longer have the luxury of a National Development Officer, and that we largely rely on the Federations, and in particular, their Development and Coaching Officers. Depending on the strength of the Federations, will be our ability to respond to the expressed needs.

We wish to tap the vast areas of expertise that exists within the Association, and the purpose of this article is to invite Associates to volunteer and be included in the Skills Register which we wish to compile. If you have skills in Management, Coaching, Lawn Care, Marketing, Recruitment and Membership retention, and would be prepared to assist a weaker club, let me know. My contact details are on the inside front cover of the Gazette. Reimbursement of travelling expenses would be met.

Additionally, the Development Committee wish to explore the possibility of appointing local Development Officers in those areas where greater assistance is required than can be reasonably expected from volunteers. A modest honorarium and expenses would be negotiated, so please contact me if interested.

To enable us to respond to the needs of the weaker clubs, please volunteer your skills and enrol on our Skills Register.

Hamish Hall,
Chairman, CA Development Committee

David Openshaw on How to improve

The former Great Britain captain gives advice on practising



Practice and Practice Success

Players often ask me, 'How can I improve my croquet?' I have three pieces of advice on this subject. The first important advice is that you must practice. If you want to improve then you must devote some time to practice. My second bit of advice concerns practice. If you want to improve then you must devote some time to practice. And my third bit of advice on improving is ... well I hope you have got the message. But one final clue is to complete the following sequence: practice, practice, ...

Practising can help in two ways. You learn to execute shots or a series of shots more accurately. Secondly, practice plays a valuable role in increasing your confidence. You must take responsibility for your own level of confidence. If you can maintain a good level of confidence about your croquet you will make the most of your technical and tactical skills. So, one of the aims of your practice should be to increase your confidence.

It is important to enjoy your practice, so make it fun. Think about how you can make it fun, by, for example, setting yourself little targets, which

you try and improve on each practice session. Equally important is that most of your practice is successful!! This may seem a strange thing to say. But you should see practice as building on your current strengths.

How do you ensure your practice is generally successful? Well, this depends on how you plan your practice. Here are some basic principles.

1. Start simple

If you are a beginner then all your practice should be on a small lawn.

If you are practising hoop running, first practise from a distance from which you can usually run the hoop, then gradually move to slightly longer or more angled hoops.

If you are starting to practise a three-ball break, then I suggest you begin the practice at hoop 4 and just practice the break from four to one-back. Keep practising your break just on those hoops until you see a significant improvement in your success ratio. Then you can extend your break by starting at hoop 3 or continuing to 2 back. As you become more successful then extend your practice to starting at hoop 1.

2. Quality not quantity

If you are practising a four-ball break, then measure your success not only by how many hoops you make but by how accurate your pioneers are and how often you get a rush after the hoop running stroke.

3. Practise what's useful

If you are practising rushing, then practice a one or two foot rush. Once you can play them well then move to slightly longer rushes. If you feel the need to practice three yard rushes, don't. Instead you will need to practice the previous shot which will give you a shorter rush.

4. Focus on your strengths

Some part of each practice session should be playing shots or breaks you that you are already very good at.

These are just a few examples of how to make your practice successful. It is really important that you focus on a gradual improvement of your skill base.

After each practice session just take a little time to review what you learnt and what skills you have improved on and what skills you need to work on more at the next session. By doing this you focus on improving specific skills, and you give yourself a sense of progress.

As an addendum, the following advice deals more with specific routines, mainly for the stronger player. It was first published in the *South West Area Newsletter (SWAN)*, the excellent magazine of the South West Federation, edited by Sue Mackay. Opinions were gleaned from Keith Aiton, David Magee, Chris Williams, James Mackay and James Hawkins.

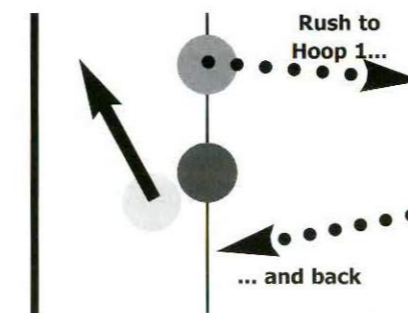
Practice = Confidence

If you want to play better croquet try spending, say, ten minutes per day, just before you go to bed, imagining

what it would be like to play better croquet. Imagine that you are on a croquet lawn, playing a game, and that every time you have to make a roquet you do; every rush goes exactly where you want it to go; every croquet stroke sends the balls to the right places; every hoop stroke works just as you would have wished. Immerse yourself in the experience so that you can see what you would see, hear what you would hear and feel what you would feel just as though you are really there. The more real you can make it the better. Feel the confidence growing. Experience the joy of knowing that everything you want to do will work just as you want it to. If you want to, say to yourself, "This is me. I am this good. This is how I play croquet."

Keep practising and playing, always with the same degree of confidence. If you play a bad stroke, dismiss it. Tell yourself that you are better than that. If you are practising and you feel yourself becoming frustrated, stop. Spend some time recovering your confidence and then resume practising. This is a very important skill to acquire for playing competitive games, as you have to recover quickly from a bad stroke in order to approach the next one in the right frame of mind.

Getting a rush from the yardline



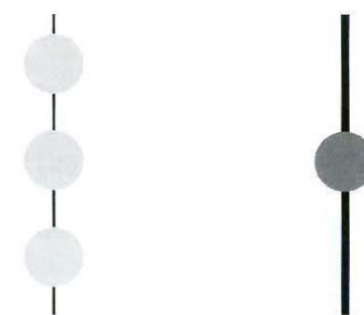
Place two balls a yard apart on the west boundary roughly level with hoop 1. With a third ball (as striker's ball) take-off from one of the balls, getting a rush on the other one to hoop 1. Rush to the hoop, approach it and run it so as to obtain a rush back to the ball remaining on the west boundary. Rush back to the west boundary and

repeat the exercise.

Going round the corners

Place a ball in each corner and then with another ball as striker's ball play round the corners via a roquet and take-off from each of the balls in turn, leaving the balls in the corners (not as easy as it might sound).

Target practice



Place a ball on the yard line and line up the other three balls, say, three yards into the lawn. If you can hit the ball on the yard line with all three balls in succession then move the three striker's balls back a yard. Otherwise repeat the exercise until you can roquet the ball on the yard line three times in succession. Continue moving back a yard each time you are successful. If you have two sets of balls you can aim for seven roquets in a row, and you can use bisques to mark off your starting points, removing them as you master each distance. As a coaching aid, some clubs have an old ball, drilled with a metal spike, which can be placed at the edge of the lawn. This gives an immovable target for shooting practice.

Improving rushing accuracy

To improve the accuracy of your rushing, place a ball a yard dead in front of a hoop. Then place a striker's ball a yard from that ball and try to rush the target ball (or cut rush it as you build up more confidence) through the hoop. As you improve you can try from further away or give yourself a bigger angle. Beginners be warned though: rushing another ball through a hoop is *much* harder than running the

same hoop with your own ball. Expect a low success rate!

Establishing a break

Practise a three ball break, always keeping a ball at the peg. Although this is just an elaboration of the earlier routine to get a rush from the yardline by Hoop 1, this is much harder. There is no pioneer at any hoop, so you are forced either:

- (i) to get rushes back to the middle after each hoop, or
- (ii) to roll up to the peg ball.

And if there's no rush available on that ball, you're forced into a long approach to the next hoop.

This doesn't necessarily give an elegant practice routine for any but the most accurate rushers, but, for players happy with big roll shots, certainly provides good preparation for a real game where a break is not yet established.

Be warned though, that this particular routine becomes very difficult very quickly (i.e. the approach to Hoop 3 from behind) unless you continue to produce decent rushes back to the middle after each hoop. Following David Openshaw's advice (*above*), try starting by maintaining the break between Hoops 4 and 1-back.

Alternatively, begin with a four-ball break, with all four balls at the peg. Getting the rush from one ball to another is much simpler in this case. Concentrate on keeping all four balls as close to the peg as possible. Once you're more confident, try discarding the fourth ball.

Concentrate on the striker's ball

Set up a four ball break, but concentrate on making the striker's ball travel as short a distance as possible on each shot. This makes you concentrate on getting rushes. Specifically, it forces you to avoid big roll shots, to plan ahead to avoid cut rushes and - and this is key to all success in break play - to think precisely about the placement of the striker's ball for each shot.

Obituaries

Brian Bamford



Brian Bamford, President of the South African Croquet Foundation, died at the age of 70 on 14th January after a lengthy battle with leukaemia.

The recipient of a Rhodes Scholarship from Oxford, he returned to South Africa in 1953, joining the Cape Bar and being appointed senior counsel. He wrote numerous book on Maritime Law, but quit his chambers when he became a senator and entered politics. It was an inauspicious start - he was 'thoroughly thumped' standing against PW Botha in 1961. In the late 60s, he again stood unsuccessfully for parliament, before finally winning the Groote Schuur seat in 1970 by a mere 73 votes, after surviving the torture of three recounts.

Described as a man of principle, it was Bamford who organised the well-publicised boycott of the Nico Malan

theatre in Cape Town after it became a 'whites only' venue. Public support was such that it opened to all soon after, a remarkable achievement at the height of the apartheid era.

His biggest battle against the Nationalist government came in the dispute over the Rhodes Estate. Bequeathed to the country, this was public property. When the government started building houses on the estate for its ministers' benefit, Bamford leapt into action, taking the Nationalist Party to court, a case which he subsequently won.

In his retirement, he assumed the Presidency of the South African Croquet Association, and lived to see his son Reg achieve the World Number One ranking, and gain the World Championship title.

Brian is survived by his widow, Maureen, children Reg and Caroline, and grandson, Alexander Brian.

Janet White

Members of Merton and Surbiton Croquet Clubs, as well as many others in the croquet community, were shocked and saddened by the sudden death on March 13th of Janet White at the age of 59.

For five years up until October last year Janet had worked as assistant to the Secretary of the Croquet Association in our office at

Hurlingham, and all who encountered her there could not fail to be impressed by the zeal and efficiency with which she performed her duties. For many years she also served as secretary of Merton Croquet Club, where she was valued not just for her organisational skills but also for the help and encouragement she gave to fellow members. Since leaving the employment of the CA she had begun to devote her energies to the affairs of Surbiton Croquet Club, where she was keen to promote the interests of high-bisquers like herself and of golf croquet players.

As a player she lacked confidence, and her handicap was never lower than 20, but she discovered her true forte as the doubles partner of an a-class player. In company with Nelson Morrow she won the Hurlingham Centenary Mixed Doubles last year, and she had been looking forward to renewing the partnership in the Peel Memorials this year.

Outside croquet she pursued an interest in many forms of handicraft, and she was very active in the community: her local Residents' Association and Townswomen's Guild are just two of the organisations who will miss her lively personality. She lived alone and never seemed to wish it otherwise, but her passing will leave a sad gap in the lives of the many people who knew and loved her.

Nigel Graves

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Croquet Paradise ... in Manchester

Is this the greatest croquet lawn ever created? asks James Hawkins



Looking round Manchester, it's easy to see how much the city has changed over the last five years. Much of the new building, the improvement in amenities, and indeed the confidence of the public can be traced back directly to Manchester's success in securing, and delivering, the 2002 Commonwealth Games.

In the wake of the events, the city has been left with a number of world-class sporting venues. Thanks to the efforts of Bury Croquet Club, croquet is now being played at one of them.

Heaton Park is in Prestwich, to the north of Manchester. It's only a couple of minutes drive from the M60 (M62 as was), and is on the route for buses and trams from the centre of the city. So much for access, what about the venue itself?

This was the location for the Commonwealth Games bowling event. There are four bowling greens, each slightly bigger than a standard croquet lawn. Typically, the local game is crown green bowls, for which

a convex surface is required. Thankfully these greens were laid for flat green bowls, and flat they certainly are.

It's difficult to imagine a more even playing surface. Levelled by laser, these are as near to perfection as any croquet lawn is likely to get. There is, quite simply, no better playing surface in the country. While most surfaces converted to croquet have sandy soil, this turf seems - by chance - better suited to croquet requirements. The top inch or so is sandy, to promote drainage, but the subsoil is a thicker, plasticky clay, ideal for firmly gripping the uprights of a hoop.

Our first chance to play at Heaton Park came in the last weekend in April, for the North West Federation Advanced Championship. This was just two weeks after the start of the inaugural season of croquet there. The deal is that, for the time being, two of the four greens are allocated to bowls, with croquet occupying the other two. By special agreement, the bowlers may hand over their share to

the croquet players for a tournament (or vice versa). To all intents and purposes, then, this can only ever be a two-lawn croquet club, but potentially a four-lawn tournament venue.

Although it's the start of our season, an unexpected March heatwave has allowed the bowlers to give the greens a good few weeks of constant play. As a result, Lawn 1, nearest the clubhouse, is significantly faster paced than the other three. The wear from overuse around the edges is of little concern to the croquet player, being outside the boundaries of a standard court. This apron of unused grass around each croquet court gives a feeling of expanse which would be considered profligate at any other club. Indeed, with a eight-yard wide central pathway, there would easily be enough room to squeeze another couple of lawns into the site.

Even the clubhouse oozes opulence. Neither bowlers nor croquet players will, I imagine, make much use of the shower rooms (they've already been commandeered for storage). High ceilings and plate glass windows give the central space the impression of being much larger than it is, though it's still a sizeable room - with bar and kitchen attached - by croquet club standards.

Outside, despite the openness, it feels secluded. The site is carved into the side of a slope, shielding it from some of the wind. And, with an eight foot perimeter fence and 24-hour infra-red closed circuit security cameras, this is one club which need never fear damage from potential vandals.

Obviously, it's a shared facility, with bowls equipment piled in the corner of the clubhouse. Nevertheless, the invasion of croquet is viewed favourably by the current bowling committee. It seems always to have been Manchester City Council's plan to have the venue used by several organisations. And, if they've got to share with someone, the flat-greeners hate croquet players much less than they hate crown-

greeners. Now that they have a perfect venue for their own game, the last thing they need is bulldozers on site relaying half their greens with ridges down the middle.

Flat green is by far the cheapest of the three games. Greens may be divided into lanes to allow a very large number of players on court simultaneously. By contrast, a croquet lawn can accommodate eight at most. Subscriptions have yet to be set for the embryonic croquet club, but it's unlikely that they'll be cheap. In this year, when the croquet section needs to justify its presence, this makes the economics a possible stumbling block.

Here's the problem. Bury Croquet Club has two decent lawns (on a disused crown green, as it happens) just three miles away in Coronation Park. Membership is comfortable, with 35 dedicated players. And, there's 15 years to run on their lease with no rent to pay, and no maintenance bill. Some members may prefer to defect. Some will want to stay. Not many will relish a sharp rise in their subscriptions to finance a dual-site club which current capacity doesn't necessitate. Whatever happens, the committee are adamant that a potential new location shouldn't risk dividing the current

membership down the middle.

So the current plan is to have Heaton Park as a separate club entirely. Bury Club would remain as it is in Coronation Park, with a new operation, possibly christened "Manchester Croquet Club" based in Prestwich. Perhaps the other clubs in the area are fertile recruiting ground. Ellesmere, less than ten minutes along the motorway, has been ailing for some time, as the poor relation in a multi-sports club. What's more, getting new blood in its out-of-the-way location has always been difficult. Pendle, to the north, faces the loss of its lawns at the end of this year. Members from each may find the new venture attractive. Looking to the south of the city, Bowdon already has a wide catchment, and a full membership which it struggles to accommodate. Being where it is, the new MCC has the potential to draw from the surrounding clubs, as well as pulling in players from all points between Liverpool and Leeds.

As for attracting beginners, Heaton Park is the headquarters of Manchester's Parks Department, who are keen to see as wide as possible a provision of services for locals. With the park as busy as it is, it appears that recruitment of new croquet players

should be an achievable aim. On our visit, just two weeks into the club's existence, there was a constant flow of semi-interested passers by going to and from the adjoining council-run garden nursery.

The recruitment issue raises some big questions. Can the Bury Club attract enough players quickly enough to stave off the conversion of the lawns to crown green? How will it impact on the other clubs in the area? And how will bowlers (and croquet players) react if there's a sudden influx of newcomers to the established bowling club?

Maybe it's wrong to imagine obstacles in the way of Heaton Park's success. Among our number for the weekend were veterans of Florida's National Croquet Center and the Sonoma Cutrer World Championship in California. It was agreed that there's no other croquet lawn in the world which comes close to the perfection of Lawn 1 at Heaton Park. Personally speaking, after 17 years of playing croquet, it takes a lot to send me home with such a sense of excitement about a patch of grass. The will surely exists to keep this outstanding facility for the benefit of croquet.

CA Club Conferences

Quiller Barrett reports

These are the issues that registered highest on members' Richter scales.

Recruitment & retention of club members

Many members thought that the poor image of the game is the main obstacle to recruitment, particularly amongst the young. The Marketing Committee has recently appointed Pat Francis to be the CA's Public Relations Officer and she has already started to work nationally to improve the situation. But it is bound to be a long haul and we need publicity officers in Federations and clubs to help. The CA will provide advice and our Marketing Committee will tell them how this can be obtained.

It was suggested that the CA leaflet being inserted in croquet sets sold by manufacturers should point out specifically that our clubs can help purchasers understand the rules as well as provide them with some coaching.

There were definite requests for success/failure case studies on recruitment to be published routinely by the CA. From this idea came the proposal that Council should set up a Skills Register of members and then offer a 'Help Desk' and a CA Consulting Service for clubs. The Register could cover more than marketing, for example lawns, finance, human resources and other management skills. The CA would have to rely on Federations and clubs to identify relevant needs.

Some clubs may be able to offer 'social' croquet and bridge (for example) days to tempt new members and help with retention. And some clubs could acquire the facilities required by disabled persons who are quite likely to find that croquet is a suitable sport for them.

Development priorities

Delegates from clubs in the south thought that Council should give priority to helping existing CA Member Clubs. Those in the north were less emphatic about this and considered that starting up clubs in 'wilderness' areas that had potential was a definite requirement.

Council knows very well that developing the game in some small and weak Federations is well nigh impossible. The paucity of experienced volunteers with the time to work on development

regionally makes this difficult to solve. The conferences agreed it was worth the Development Committee experimenting with the appointment of one or two paid Regional Officers who will be responsible for getting development moving in such areas.

Federations & non-CA Member Clubs

Some Federations allow non-CA Member Clubs to become members. This has caused difficulties for the CA when it wished to help these Federations with funds. The general view was that Federations should do all they can to encourage such clubs to join, or affiliate to, the CA.

Council decided at its March meeting to allow clubs to affiliate to the CA, by paying a fixed fee of £25 per annum. This will entitle them to an entry in the Directory and on the CA's website, and to receive the Gazette and CA Noticeboard. Normally only clubs that have not been members of the CA during the previous three years will be eligible to affiliate. We hope this first step on the CA ladder will be useful to clubs that are just starting and have limited resources.

Finance and benefits for Member Clubs

Conference delegates were told that now the CA has its own office at Cheltenham, and the President's Appeal was approaching £20,000 for development, Council felt able to reduce the CA's reserves so that benefits to clubs can be enhanced significantly.

Needless to say, there was enthusiastic support for the ideas put forward. These include:

- ♦ Grants to clubs for non-running-cost items. Council's policy is to take positive steps to increase the take-up of such benefits by Member Clubs.
- ♦ Civil liability insurance for clubs paid by the CA without any extra charge to clubs (at least initially). The feasibility of this is currently being investigated.
- ♦ Council has altered the definition of 'Junior' to "those who are under 21 or in continuing full-time education up to first degree level".
- ♦ People who qualify for CA Junior membership will be exempt from the

Member Club subscription (new policy agreed by Council).

- ♦ Discount on purchases by Member Clubs from the CA Shop (currently being considered).
- ♦ More CA courses and talks to help clubs develop in the widest sense (their members as well as structures and lawns).

There was support from the floors for Council to consider extending the regulation that permits non-CA Associate members to play in their first CA Calendar tournament. Possibilities would be to allow them to play in tournaments being hosted by their own clubs, and/or to play in one tournament each year.

The Gazette

Delegates confirmed they liked the idea that the magazine should contain more articles of general interest (particularly coaching) to club members who have not so far played in CA Calendar tournaments. It was thought this would be an incentive to become a CA Associate.

Handicapping

Publication of Handicap Guidelines (imminent) was welcomed and it was felt this would help to dispel the widespread view that for many years Council has not responded adequately to members' concerns on this topic.

There was a request for some training for club handicappers.

It was suggested that the CA should encourage full-bisque play much more than hitherto and it should also recommend one system for establishing the base.

Coaching

There were pleas for more regional coaching for members of clubs in the weaker Federations and for Council to consider reducing the cost of its coaching courses.

Updates

Speakers updated delegates on Child Protection policies and on tax breaks for clubs.

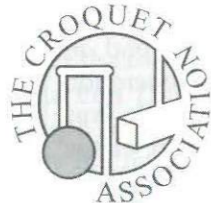
The general consensus was that Council should repeat the conferences every two years.

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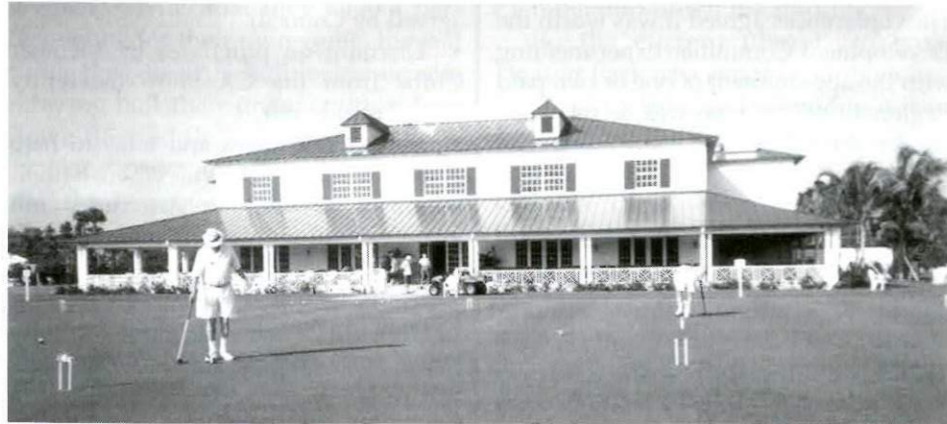
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"Never ask an American if they want to knock up!"

Kevin Carter reports from the first croquet package holiday to Florida



In the September 2002 issue of *The Croquet Gazette* we announced a croquet-based holiday in Florida the following February. A block of 40 places was reserved on a Virgin Atlantic flight from Gatwick and in a Palm Beach hotel. These places were rapidly taken and we were joined by a further 18 players from N. America to make a highly successful tournament.

The holiday element of the trip was organised by Diplomatic Travel, a tour operator that had experience of organising themed holidays for jazz enthusiasts and lawn bowlers - so croquet was a doddle! Nicky Evans, travelling partner from Diplomatic, had the additional advantage of insider advice from her father, John Hobbs. Joint managers of the croquet events were Kevin Carter and Ian Plummer, while Bob Alman and Archie Peck looked after the American end of things.

As the Brits arrived at Gatwick the abiding impression as one of the large number of mallets, variously cocooned in wood, metal or plastic to protect them from the ravages of the baggage mishandlers. Indeed, John Hobbs had a very large bag, with 21 mallets - one to use and 20 to sell!

After a ten-hour flight, with not a single good film available, we were in the Miami sunshine and heading by coach northwards to swanky West Palm Beach. For those of us who had not been there before and enjoy the rolling green English countryside, we were struck by how boring the Florida landscape seemed - nothing but a completely flat, drained swamp!

We were booked into a 'budget' hotel, the Airport Holiday Inn, an

undistinguished block of concrete wedged between the freeway and a railway line. We knew not to expect luxury and this hotel had many advantages: the nearest one to the club, free shuttles on request and it was half the price of the better 'down-town' establishments. And the camaraderie resulting from all the Brits being together added much, too.

Early the following day, Saturday, we had our breakfast waffles and then it was straight off to the 'National Croquet Center' to look around and practice. This is a first impression that did stick. The NCC is a magnificent facility. It has twelve very fine courts, an \$8 million club house (which, of course, we Brits immediately christened 'The Hut') and whole area includes palm trees and a lake. The Rolls Royce parked outside completed the sense of opulence - we later heard it was to be the prize in a \$100 raffle!

This was the first big Association Croquet tournament organised at the NCC. They wanted a 'Tournament the English Way'. There was a steep learning curve: "You mean everybody will want to play all day?"; "Why do you need 150 sticks to represent these things called bisques?"; "What exactly do you mean by a Swiss?".



Now, Bob Alman is a very accommodating and engaging chap. As Director of Marketing for the NCC he is achieving great success. However, he would be the last person to assert that his personal organisation is top notch. And when he lost his file (which was never ultimately found) just minutes before we arrived it did cause one or two problems... like, the only record of which Americans were due to play in which events was on one piece of paper in that file. It could be said that this made organising the format of the events an interesting challenge.

Besides this little problem, the Carter/Plummer management duo had to learn how to set the NCC's strange hoops. These are steel and with long 'X' cross-section fins to steady them in the sandy ground. The gap is set by gripping the hoops in callipers as they are hammered home (or "banging in the wickets" as they say over there). In fact, however, tight the setting they were always relatively easy to run, because of the 'give' in the ground.

It would be fair to say that in Florida the cosmetic aspect has a greater prominence than in England. No, we are not talking about face-lifts, chin-tucks and silicon implants. The lawns had to look good, too. So, green-dyed sand was sprinkled over the old hoop holes and when there was a patch of grass with a brownish hue: no problem, just spray it green!

In fact, as a sort of 'Operations Director', Archie Peck had everything well under control - from the immaculate lawns to the 'Pro Shop'. Mind you, he has the staff and the equipment to do a good job. For instance, the 'groundsman's hut' is probably large enough to accommodate all of the buildings of Cheltenham inside it!

The only time we saw him at all fazed was when he planted one of each of about ten different designs of hoop he had acquired to test their suitability in the sandy ground. He banged in one straight though a water pipe ...

Sunday morning saw the start of the tournament proper, with two solid days of handicap singles. Most games went quickly in the easy conditions and three per day were available for those who wanted them. This event continued later in the week to mop-up spare players who wanted a game.

A number of Brits chose to skip the handicap doubles on Tuesday and Wednesday to go sightseeing. However, a substantial number of N. American players (two had flown in from Canada) joined us and we were able to have almost every pair comprising one Brit and one N. American. This worked well, despite many local players having never before tried Association or 'International Rules' croquet. Indeed many afterwards said it was far more interesting than the USCA Rules game.

The third part of the tournament, running from Thursday through to Saturday, was the 'Class Events'. Four UK minus players were joined by some good N. American players to make a good quality 'A': Jeff Soo, Stewart Jackson, Peter Just, Johnny Mitchell, Louis Nel, Mike Jenner and Ted Quimby.

While all this croquet was going on we were all holidaying, too. Nicky organised two all-day outings; firstly, a gentle guided meander around Loxahatchee Wildlife Reserve where we saw alligators and some wonderful bird life, walk through a cyprus swamp, finishing with an afternoon at the seaside, sunbathing and swimming on Delray Beach.

The second day-trip was to the Kennedy Space Centre. This was a fascinating day out. We saw the launch pads, a retired shuttle and various older rockets and capsules. There were many really interesting films, talks and exhibits and a group of intrepid croquet players finished the day in a G Force flight simulator.

However, most of the non-croquet

pastimes were organised by the travellers themselves. Two of the eight non-playing spouses were golfers, so we saw little of them all week. We also had a useful eight bridge players. And of course several groups explored the downtown restaurants every night.

Our last full day, on the final Sunday, was Finals Day, followed by dinner and prize-giving at the NCC. The first event to be decided was the Handicap Singles, in which Dick Knapp (who plays his summer croquet at Surbiton and Roehampton, but is a member of the NCC, where he plays in the winter) comprehensively out-pointed Jolyon Kay (Blewbury).

Our finalists in the doubles were Mike Jenner (Chicago), who was shown a thing or two about our game by his partner, Deidre Duggan (Bristol), versus Louis Nel (Canada) and David Clarke (Sidmouth). Mike's skill and Deidre's consistency proved too much for Louis and David's challenge.

Two of the doubles finalist also competed in class event finals. David Clarke took the runner-up spot again in the 'C', losing to John Kennedy (Beverley). The 'D' was won by Geoff Young (Bury) from Phil Terry (Middlesbrough) and the 'B' by Alan Newman (Plymouth) from Peter Quinn (Hurlingham and Surbiton).

In the Open Championship the obvious first seed was Jeff Soo. Unfortunately, Jeff missed the semi-finals owing to his being at the wrong end of a three-way tie in his block, but he demonstrated his skills with five triples in his eight games. Samir Patel (Surbiton) also completed four triples in the tournament (but usually lost when he didn't!) and several others completed one or two.

Mike Jenner played his fellow American Stewart Jackson (NCC) in one semi-final, with Mike winning a lengthy and very close battle 2-1. In the other Louis Nel was beaten by the sole remaining Brit, Ian Plummer (Oxford and Surbiton), whose game has seemingly been revitalised by a new mallet. Mike beat Ian 2-1 in an absorbing final.

It was clear to us that some of the top American rules players, such as

Mike and Stewart, could become very good at Association once they have more experience. They generally don't try triples and have to work out some tactics - such as what to do when one-ball is pegged-out - from first principles.

So, after an excellent dinner and copious wine we awarded prizes, with some very nice pewter salvers for winners and some unusual ceramic what-nots for runners-up. However, there was far more to prize-giving than the croquet awards. We had a long list of special prizes, including:

- ♦ *The Sportsmanship Prize* to Kathleen Terry, who played off a handicap of 20, never won a single game but was cheerful throughout.
- ♦ *The Fan Club Prize* to Nigel Gray, who could not play because of illness but turned up every day to support us.
- ♦ *For Remembering to Bring a Union Jack*: Rosemary Danby.
- ♦ *The Best Knees*: John Munro.
- ♦ *The Best Hat*: Liz Webb.
- ♦ *Mr Smoothie*: Peter Quinn, who entertained us all week with his 101 ways of chatting up Palm Beach waitresses.

The participants in this first croquet-based holiday were unanimous that it was a success. Diplomatic Travel is already organising another in Florida next January, and is considering other locations for a similar format.

Palm Beach in its high season is by no means a cheap resort, but for a group of croquet players looking for a holiday in the winter sun among others with a shared interest it is an attractive option.

Soon after we arrived in Florida the temperature reached 85F (30C), but then, horror-of-horrors, a cold front crossed the state and the temperature plummeted to 75F (24C) for a few days. Most of the Brits flew back to Gatwick on Tuesday morning, where the stewardess told us as we landed: "I cannot tell you the temperature at Gatwick in Fahrenheit because it is off my conversion chart, but we are told it is -6C".

News & Information

England vs South Africa

A match between England and South Africa has been announced, and is scheduled to take place at Edgbaston on 9-10 August. The English team has yet to be announced,



but the African side will comprise the established names of Reg Bamford, Mark Suter and Andrew Hobbs, to be joined by the exciting new prospects Meshack Mazibuko and Victor Dladla.

Dladla (pictured left) and Mazibuko (right) are the first black South Africans to emerge at the top level since the end of Apartheid. Coming fresh to serious competition, corporate sponsorship has allowed them to come to Britain during August to participate in the event at Edgbaston, as well as tournaments at Nottingham and Bowdon.

Manager of the Great Britain MacRobertson Team

The International Committee has appointed Phil Cordingley as Manager of the Great Britain MacRobertson Shield team. His roles are to assist the team in all non-playing matters and to represent the CA. In these two roles he will be responsible

to the Captain of the Team and to the Chairman of the International Committee. The tests will take place at the National Croquet Center in Florida from 9-19 November.

Aaahh...

Congratulations to Rusty Llewellyn (below), who has recently taken up croquet at Llanfairfechan Croquet Club, and now challenges for the title of Britain's Shortest Player.



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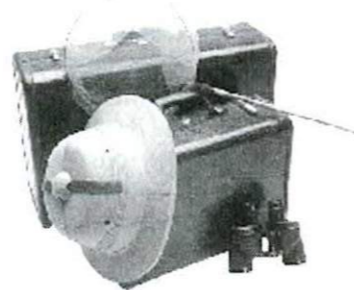
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www.diplomatic.co.uk or www.oxfordcroquet.com



CA Annual General Meeting

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at Roehampton Club on Saturday 12 October 2002

Present:

JW Solomon (President) - in the Chair
RQ Barrett (Chairman of Council)
Dr IG Vincent (Vice-Chairman of Council)
Dr RW Bray (Treasurer)
AJ Oldham (Vice-President)
Prof BG Neal (Vice-President)
NR Graves (Secretary)
and 31 Associates

OPENING ADDRESS

The President welcomed all those present to the Meeting and thanked them for their support.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Hamish Hall, James Hawkins, Pauline Healy, Bryan Judson, Barry Keen, David and Eileen Magee, Bruce Rannie, Stan Salt, Charles Waterfield and Jenny Williams.

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 13 October 2001 were signed as a true record of that Meeting.

3. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman had distributed the following report before the meeting, and questions were invited.

Council's Report to Members

This item is 'Chairman's Report' on the agenda. But in fact our Rules require the Council to submit a report to the AGM and I want to move more in this direction. It is a convenient year to make this change because the Management Committee has been able to look at the principal objectives that Council and our committees set a year ago and monitor how much progress has been made.

Coaching

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.

Development

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.

Golf Croquet

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. The objective is to consolidate existing events.

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.

International

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 topclass play.

Laws

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.

Management

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.

Marketing

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

Publishing

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.

Tournaments

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.

Sport England

Little progress has been made on compiling a Strategic Development Plan for the CA. Council has this item on its agenda.

Council Medal

A Council Medal was awarded to Judy Anderson in recognition of the outstanding development work she has done over 20 years, particularly in East Anglia.

The new office and the President's Appeal Council members debated at some length the helpful offers we received from clubs to accommodate the new CA office. Once the decision was taken to move to Cheltenham building work proceeded apace and our Secretary should be working in his new environment by the time of this AGM. Council is most grateful to Nigel Graves

and Janet White, his assistant, for their patience and understanding during the time when the new location was being discussed. Sadly we are saying goodbye to Janet after more than five years, as she will not be moving to the Cotswolds. We thank her for her contribution.

Thanks are also due to David Magee, and Bryan Judson who chaired the Management Committee this year and is retiring from Council; they had the major responsibility for seeing through the building project.

The President is launching an Appeal for donations to top up our reserves, which have been depleted by some £60,000 in order to move the office to Cheltenham.

4. ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR TO 31 DECEMBER 2001 AND TREASURER'S REPORT

The Treasurer presented the Accounts for the year to 31 December 2001, and gave a brief report.

The Accounts were approved nem. con.

5. ELECTION OF TREASURER

There being no other nomination, Dr RW Bray was duly re-elected as Treasurer.

6. ELECTION OF REPORTING ACCOUNTANTS

Proposed by WH Arliss, seconded by Dr IG Vincent, Marian Hemsted was elected as Reporting Accountant for the current financial year nem. con.

7. ELECTION OF COUNCIL MEMBERS

There having retired under Rule 18(a)(i) Messrs WH Arliss and HM Hall by rotation, and Messrs P Cordingley and DM Magee who had been chosen to fill casual vacancies under Rule 24(a), and Mrs TW Anderson and Messrs DJ Hopkins and RWB Judson having given notice of their resignation from Council, the number of vacancies on Council was seven.

Messrs Arliss, Hall and Cordingley sought re-election under Rule 18(a)(i). Two other nominations had been received as follows:

Mr DJ Kibble proposed by IG Vincent and seconded by Professor A Pidcock.
Mr CL Sheen proposed by DJ Hopkins and seconded by WH Arliss.

As there were five candidates for the seven vacancies on Council no election was necessary, and the meeting declared these five people elected to Council.

8. MOTION OF THE COUNCIL

The following motion was approved, voting being as follows:

Individual Members: FOR 184
AGAINST 11
ABSTAINED 1
Club Members: FOR 29
AGAINST 1
ABSTAINED 1

That the Rules of the Croquet Association be amended by the deletion of Clause (e) of Appendix 1.

9. BENEFACTORS' BOOK

The Secretary read the names in the Benefactors' Book.

10. PRESENTATION OF THE APPS AND STEEL MEMORIAL BOWLS

The Apps Memorial Bowl for the most improved male player of 2001 had been awarded to Marcus Evans of Nailsea Club, and he received the trophy from the President.

The Steel Memorial Bowl for the most improved female player of 2001 had been awarded to Jenny Williams, of Bowdon Club, who was unable to be present.

11. PRESENTATION OF CROQUET ASSOCIATION DIPLOMAS

The Secretary announced the award of the Diploma to the following:

Barrie March Ashby & District CC
Eileen Magee Cheltenham CC

Bernard Weitz Cheltenham CC
Betty Weitz Cheltenham CC
Stan Salt Dyffryn CC
Rosemary Gugan Bristol CC
Barbara Evans Bristol CC

The last two were present at the meeting, and received their Diplomas from the President.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Bevis Sanford (Hurlingham) asked about the current membership of the Association. He was informed that individual membership remained static at about 1600.

The Treasurer enquired whether there were agreed criteria for names to be entered in the Benefactors Book. The question was referred to Council for their consideration.

13. PRESIDENT'S CLOSING ADDRESS

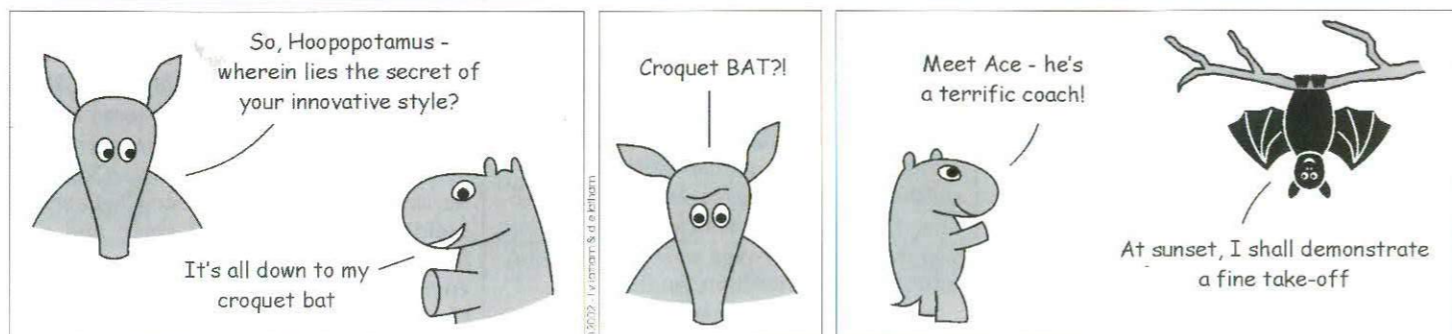
The President had little to add to what had gone before in the meeting. He commended the Chairman of Council for introducing a written Council's Report, which he considered a great improvement. He referred to the establishment of the new office at Cheltenham, and drew attention to the appeal he was launching to replenish the Association's reserves which had been depleted by the cost of the new building. He apologised in advance for any offence he may inadvertently have caused by his failure to recall correctly a member's first name.

He thanked those present for attending the meeting, which provided them with the opportunity to participate in the affairs of the Association.

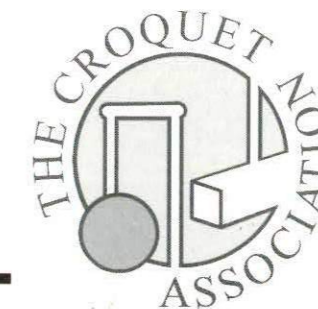
There being no further business, the meeting closed at 12.15.

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Timer	£8.00
Croquet Girl cards - pack of 8, blank inside	£4.50
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A wide variety of croquet publications are available, including:

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The Laws of Golf Croquet	£2.00
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