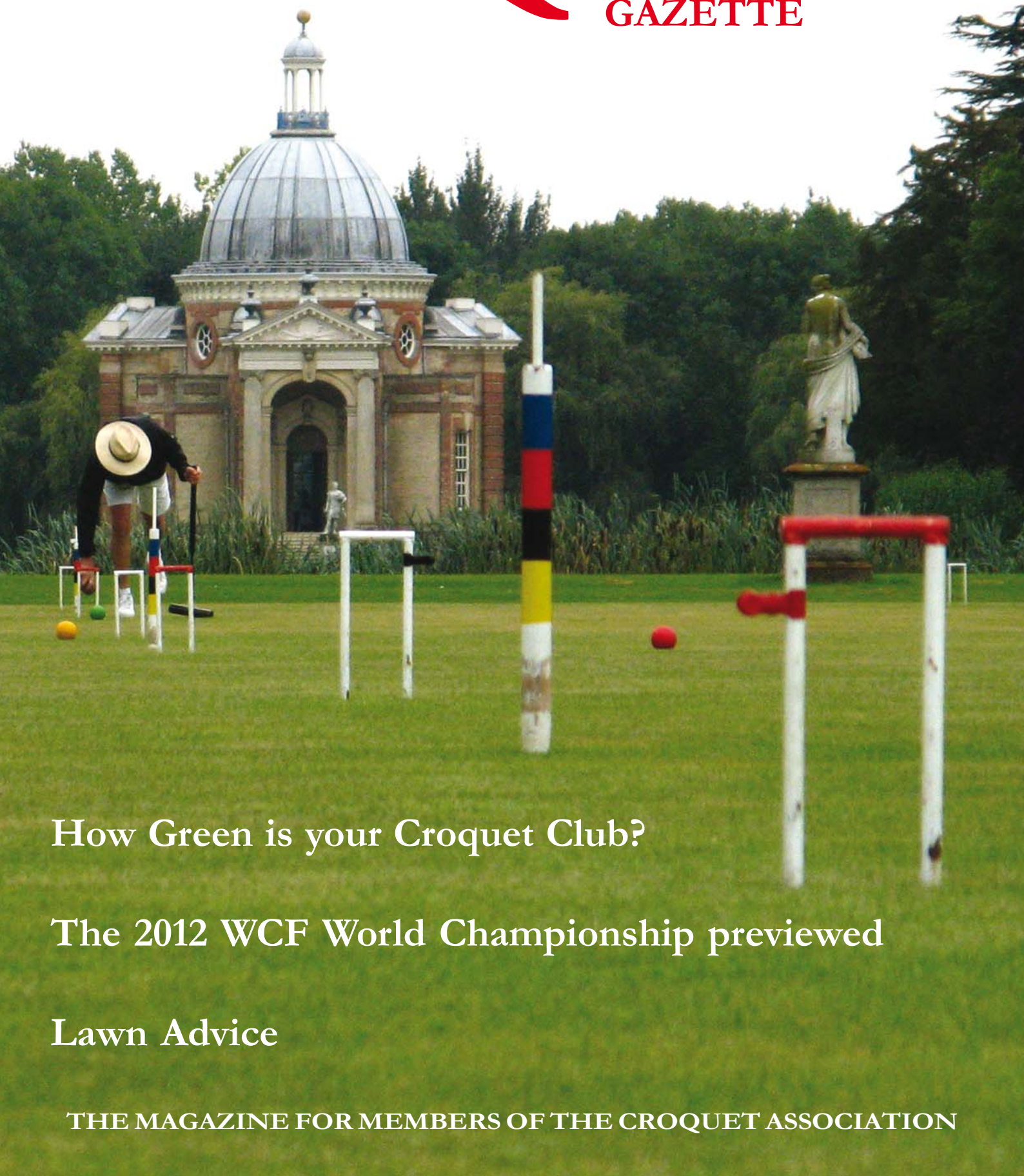


THE

April 2012 — Issue 337

# CROQUET

GAZETTE



How Green is your Croquet Club?

The 2012 WCF World Championship previewed

Lawn Advice

THE MAGAZINE FOR MEMBERS OF THE CROQUET ASSOCIATION

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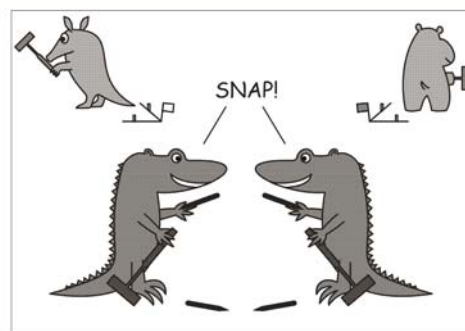
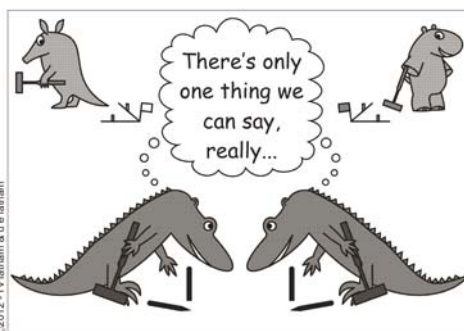
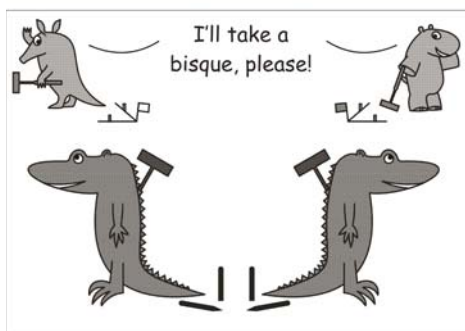
Email contributions, including tournament reports should be sent direct to the Editor, or copied to the Editor if they are being posted to the Nottingham List. Digital images are the easiest to work with, but coloured photographic prints are also acceptable. Please send digital jpeg or tiff format files. Please accompany all images with a description of the subject of the picture. If you require any material to be returned please enclose an SAE.

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## HOOPOTAMUS

by Victor





# THE CROQUET GAZETTE



Issue 337 February 2012

Front Cover: Play in progress at Wrest Park  
Photo by John Bevington

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## Chairman's Column

Now is that time of the year when clubs are offering all sorts of trials, courses, etc, to persuade the public to come and try the game, and hopefully join the club. My club is no different, with two taster days being offered before we run our usual 'try the game' course over 6 weeks in May and June. Once the new players join the club, they are often seen playing together on our lawns. They play together, chatting as they go round the court, one hoop at a time. They also ask any experienced club members present to sort out any problems which may arise, such as playing the wrong ball. Advice on what they should do next while they are playing is also regularly sought. They always play with extra turns for both players, which mean that they are finished after about an hour. Perhaps I should say that they are not playing Golf Croquet - they are playing Short Croquet. This is an excellent way of persuading newcomers to the game to take up Association Croquet. One advantage is that you can put twice as many players out on the half - size lawns used, which can be very useful when the lawns are busy. I strongly recommend that you try this approach at your club.



Most of our newcomers move up to the full lawn game by the end of their first season and they also go on to play in our Short Croquet team in the Federation league. In addition to the leagues, Federations offer a range of other services to their member clubs supported by Council. Council has decided to investigate how well the CA link with the Federations operates. A working group has been set up to consult with the Federations on the current ways we work together and to investigate where improvements can be made. It is essential that the Federations participate fully in this consultation process, so if you have any views on how the relationship should be developed, please tell your Council Federation Representative. Alternatively, the Chairman of the working group, Brian Shorney, will be pleased to hear from you.

Finally, it is with much sadness that I have to report that this season is the last time that croquet will be played on the existing lawns at Wrest Park. As those of you who have played there will know, the unique setting, with the house in one direction and the lake and folly in the other, makes playing croquet very special. The owners of the site, English Heritage, are planning to put the grounds back to their original state and part of this exercise involves removing the croquet lawns. However it is not all gloom, as the club will move to another site near the entrance to the estate where four new lawns will be prepared. Meanwhile, all those players who have played there over the last 40 or so years should consider taking the opportunity to make a pilgrimage to the club and enter one of its final tournaments. I have already gained a place in the last tournament to be played and look forward to enjoying the hospitality of the club members as we reminisce about earlier times.

Barry Keen

## Editorial



Welcome to the April issue, which has a diverse range of content. As the Chairman touched on in his column, we are at the start of another season and I think he is quite right to promote a somewhat forgotten form of play, which is short croquet. I know it can be a valuable tool for beginners in terms in lawn use and time, but it can also be of benefit to players who cannot physically manage on a full-size lawn, as well as making the 'larger picture' of the game and tactics more easily understood. Incidentally, I've even heard more experienced players ask 'why there aren't any tournaments?'

Questions on other subjects in this issue cover such topics as the economic climate and the impact of Local Authority cuts on club, as well as the Development Committee asking 'how green is your croquet club?' Meanwhile other individuals offer their views on how possibly to change the way we describe the sport and a change to the handicapping system - so it would appear that we are waking early to the new season.

This early start to the 2012 season is even more essential for the players selected to play in the WCF AC World Championship to be played in Adelaide from April 26<sup>th</sup> to May 6<sup>th</sup>. Those players are Keith Aiton, Mark Avery, Rutger Beijderwellen, Jeff Dawson, James Death, Marcus Evans, Robert Fulford, Jim Field, Gabrielle Higgins, Ian Lines, David Maugham, Stephen Mulliner, David Openshaw, Samir Patel and Richard Smith. We wish them all good fortune; elsewhere in this issue Chris Clarke previews the Championship and gives his tips for this year's possible top performers.

*Gail Curry*

## Letters

### Northampton Tournament is on

Due to an error in the 2012 Fixtures book it is stated on page 101 that the Northampton mid week tournament is cancelled due to poor lawn conditions. This is incorrect and the tournament is running, so anyone wishing to enter should do so.

*Nick Evans*

### Last orders at Wrest Park

For any tournament players who have neither read the Wrest Park entry in the Fixtures Book nor seen the note on the club website, or who are otherwise still unaware of the fact, I would like to take the opportunity to remind you that this year is your last chance to play on the old lawns inside Wrest Park.



*A resident member inspects the lawns before play in April 2011*

English Heritage has begun a long-term revitalisation project to restore the gardens to their appearance before the estate was sold by the De Grey family in 1917, and the first stage, including the opening of a new Visitor Centre, was completed last year. It was decided that, in order to present the garden "in the context of its historical significance", the croquet club and its decidedly non-historic buildings would have to move. English Heritage is currently preparing four lawns on a site at the top of the drive, which we hope will be ready for next season. The club will have access to an existing pavilion with running water, gas and electricity, and there is ample parking close at hand.

It is an ironic coincidence that this year is also the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the club's first CA tournament: a handicap event in June 1972, which was followed by an invitation tournament in September. A certain Barry Keen won his block in both tournaments.

He was obviously a rapid improver as his handicap had dropped from 6½ to 2½ in the space of three months. We are delighted to hear that he will be back this year, and we look forward to meeting friends old and new before time is called.

*John Bevington*

### Front cover issue

The cover of February's gazette does the game no service. While we CA members may be interested in Bowdon's centenary and appreciate the post-modern irony of using an "Edwardian lady" on the cover, this hardly promotes the idea of croquet as a modern, compelling and competitive game. Recruiting new players, especially younger ones is not easy so it is a pity that the Gazette could not provide a more upbeat, modern image of the game. Perhaps a more helpful image would have been that of Rachel Rowe - a young champion.

Could I also take this opportunity to thank David Magee (Lawn renovation at Cheltenham) for his article, which was much more interesting than just "watching grass grow".

*Adam Moliver*

*I appreciate part of what is being said here and believe it was unfortunate that the text that should have been on the photo to attribute it to a centenary celebration met with an inexplicable fate. As well as this the photo was the only one I had from an item that was of necessary orientation and sufficient size. Additionally Rachel Rowe had been on the previous issue, having held publication in order to gain a photo. What has been a fairly constant problem over a period of years is the lack of suitable photos for the front cover. It is a very rare occasion when I have more than one suitable image, I often have to go in search of them. So, if 'we' as members of the CA want a more upbeat, modern image of the game, then 'we' need to be prepared to take more photos and increase the choice at the disposal of the Gazette.*

*Gail Curry*

### Local or National?

Here at Tyneside CC we are suddenly faced with an enormous problem with our landlord, the local council.

Government have set Newcastle-upon-Tyne Council to cut their budget for 2012 by £30 million. The Council have slashed the budget for parks and countryside by £800,000 and out of this

have reduced the budget for bowling greens by £100,000 which could mean the closure of up to eight greens. As we are situated in Exhibition Park with two ex bowling greens and currently have the use of the ex bowling green in Nuns Moor Park we are now faced with the possibility of losing our croquet courts. Meetings are at an early stage but things look very ominous – we have already set up a subcommittee and have a strategy in place to negotiate with the council but getting to meet them is proving elusive. The council have stated that they do not wish to close any clubs so we believe we may have the chance to negotiate new leases for greens and pavilion maintenance plus payments for electricity and water usage. Having had a low rent since the early nineties, it seems likely that we will now face a massive hike in rent also, so with all this sudden increase in expenditure, it could mean a large subs increase for our members – which could have the possibility of some members not renewing their membership.

I wonder if any clubs are experiencing this situation, and if so, perhaps could offer some guidance on how you are reacting to the problem.

*Derek Watts*

### Triple-A-Peeling Ale

I wonder if you might pass on some information to your readers about my launch of an interesting bottle-conditioned bitter. The beer has been created specifically for the interest of croquet clubs as, when I am not playing Association Croquet (HC 1.5), managing my licensed ‘nanobrewery’ (not quite a micro!) is my second passion. Ramsbottom Craft Brewery came into being in December 2011 and uses the full brewing techniques used by larger microbreweries: temperature-controlled mashing and fermenting, liquid yeast culturing in house, brewing 100% from grain using every available European malt. All this combines to make the highest quality beers. This year I expect to ferment 2500 litres of ale!

If any club would like to order “Triple-A-Peeling” which is available in 500ml bottles, 12 to a case, with striking label (as shown) they simply need to email me at [themattholmes@aol.com](mailto:themattholmes@aol.com). I am certain the novelty value would be appreciated at many croquet club bars....or you could use them as tournament runner-up prizes etc. There are plenty of other styles of beer available: Honey beer, stout, mild, dunkel weizen, hefeweizen, Belgian style witbier, American



style IPAs, English IPAs, and Bohemian Pilsners. Something for everyone really; but remember to drink in moderation, especially when playing!

*Matt Holmes*

### Holiday Accommodation

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## Club News

### Ipswich CC

#### Looking for a better home

*By Martin French*

Ipswich Croquet Club has been based in a public park in the centre of Ipswich for 81 years. We’ve now decided to move, and in April 2012 will re-open 2 miles away at Fynn Valley Golf Club. Part 1 explains what made us move; Part 2 next year will let you know how it’s gone.

ICC has long had two reasonable though sloping lawns in a lovely setting – Lower Arboretum in Christchurch Park, Ipswich. But you can’t live on views alone, and we have struggled in recent years to recruit and retain members. Like a fair number of croquet clubs in the UK that are rented from the local Council, it is situated in a public park – with all the good and bad points that brings. The Council has always done their best to be helpful – but have been increasingly limited in what they could do, and less and less certain about future provision. Our thinking that led to our move may be of interest to other public-park clubs.

The park was refurbished 4 or 5 years ago with a Heritage Lottery Fund grant – but the changes that affected our club were not really for the better:

- Our Edwardian club hut (20m from the lawns) was replaced with a new log cabin right by the lawns. But the addition of heavy wooden shutters that are almost impossible to open makes our new hut just a dark cave

- The seedy old public loo was replaced with a trendy new vandal-proof loo – which has been shut much of the last two seasons due to vandalism!

This caused a bit of a crisis and a year ago, we looked at what we could do to improve things. We investigated installing a septic tank, running water and a toilet in our club hut. But the quotes came in at over £8,000 – and this would have been making improvements to a Council-owned hut over which we had no security-of-tenure.

There is growing uncertainty over facilities provided by local authorities in these austere times – and these problems could affect the club’s very existence - so we took stock. Putting aside our loyalty to ICC, we looked at it objectively and realised just why we had so much trouble attracting new members:



### Strengths

- a. Beautiful setting
- b. Walking distance to town centre and for some members
- c. Low membership costs (compared to most private croquet clubs)

### Weaknesses

1. Lawns which are deteriorating
2. No loo, running water or kitchen plumbing – and new public toilet building is a failure. The lack of electricity further reduces the facilities we can offer
3. No nearby parking – difficult to access if you don't live within walking distance. Even disabled parking is very remote
4. Have to remove hoops and now boundary boards after play
5. Ever-present threat of vandalism
6. No security of tenure nor certainty of future costs 7
- Growing problems with biting insects – plus squirrels, foxes and crows digging holes in lawns
8. The heavy shutters are too cumbersome to remove – so our hut is dark and unwelcoming.
9. Short, inflexible 5 month season

Set down like this, we suddenly realised why we couldn't attract new members – our "proposition" was just too unattractive. We run corporate evenings and come-and-try-it days and courses – often getting upwards of 75 potential recruits each year to visit – but hardly anyone comes back! People – who haven't yet had time to become enthusiasts – are put off by poor parking and toilet facilities and the "dark shed" that serves as a club house. There were three options:

1. do nothing and carry on as we are, hoping things would improve
2. spend much of the club's reserves providing the toilet and plumbing
3. use those reserves to move the club to a new venue with better facilities and a more secure future.

We thought the first option was inviting extinction. The Council was considering raising rents to croquet and bowls by large amounts, or requiring the clubs to undertake much of the maintenance – or both. With stagnant membership numbers, we couldn't absorb higher costs and would go bust. The second option seemed foolhardy, given it did nothing to fix the other shortcomings, such as poor parking. We decided to investigate moving the club.

So in October 2010, I took an opportunity to visit Hamptworth – a croquet club set on a golf course. Richard Stevens (club president) was very helpful, showing me round and discussing how they had done it and how they worked with the golf club company. I wrote up what I'd found in a paper for the ICC AGM, also pointing out the Gazette article on the Rother Valley club as another example of piggy-backing a croquet club on existing sports facilities. The AGM gave the go-ahead to investigate.

We drew up a 'shopping list' of what we would ideally like in a new venue:

- at least 2 full size lawns with space for 2 more later
- flat site, good grass – likely to make good courts within a year
- easy access from Ipswich
- parking close to lawns
- decent toilets and changing rooms
- croquet lawns close to main club house
- nice main club house, with bar (good beer!) and food

- good enough security to leave hoops and boundary boards out
- security of tenure
- shelter and equipment hut right by lawns
- 2m of space around lawns for mowing and to let lawns be moved about
- hedges/ shelter from prevailing wind
- a longer season – at least April into October
- possibility for 1 lawn to stay open in winter
- costs that would translate into subs of no more than £175.

We also identified about a dozen golf clubs, sports clubs or country house hotels within a few miles of the town. We prioritised them, and got lucky with the first one we contacted. Not all our wishes came true, but it scores very well against our shopping list.

Fynn Valley Golf Club is only a couple of miles north of Ipswich, very easy to get to by car. They had an underused piece of land, large enough for 3 lawns, about 70m from the clubhouse. The owner/ MD was very positive right from the start – he'd been looking for a better use for this area than a rarely-used "overflow car park". It had been seeded with the same grass mix as his golf greens, which we inspected and were fabulous. It hadn't been cut that short of course, and the site has a slight slope. But it's free-draining, we can put a log-cabin with a large verandah right by the lawns, park right by them (or in the main car park by the club house), and the owner/ MD saw no problem with a year-round opening – after all, his golf greens were played on 365 days a year.

After the first very positive meeting, we began to discuss by email and further meetings how we could get croquet set up from the following spring. The owner/ MD visited our existing club to understand what we had - he was determined he could do better! After looking at a few alternative plans, we settled on a very simple financial model where we pay an annual rent for 2 lawns being prepared, maintained and developed. ICC provides the equipment, pavilion, and sets out the hoops and lawns.

Realising we were in no position to guarantee long term rents, neither could we expect the golf club to give us long term guarantees for the future – so we've jointly agreed a straightforward Memorandum of Understanding, where we set down everything we'd discussed and agreed. This means we both know where we stand and what our intentions are.

We've had a closing ceremony at our old venue, drawn up a plan to move to the new site, and expect to be buying and building a better log cabin pavilion, with decent verandah, in about March. We've received a development grant from the CA, which will cover half the cost of the new log cabin pavilion. We're hoping to re-open on 6<sup>th</sup> April 2012, but there's a lot to do before then.

In the long term, once our membership numbers are over 50, we can look at bringing the third lawn into use and/ or having the lawns fully levelled. Before that bigger commitment, we'd need to agree a proper lease. But that's for the future.

## *Bears seen all over Europe*

### **The Bear of Rodborough on Tour**

*By Don Gaunt*

The Bear of Rodborough CC is a one-lawn club situated in the grounds of a coaching inn, located on Rodborough Common in Gloucestershire and surrounded by the magnificent Stroud Valley scenery. We recently celebrated our silver anniversary with several events including a superb dinner attended by the CA President,



Good food and good company play an important part in the jollies

Bernard Neal.

With only one lawn, we have a closed membership of 25 with a waiting list of people wishing to join. We are active in the South West Federation, in 2010 winning two out of the five Association leagues and runners-up in a third. We meet on two evenings a week, one for Golf and one for Association, plus occasional days through the season. In the winter we meet socially once a month at a local hostelry and every fortnight to play snooker. Fifteen years ago, we started visiting other clubs both at home and abroad. These trips are not competitions but an opportunity to meet other like-minded people to talk, eat and play a little friendly croquet. Hospitality is always overwhelming, proving that croquet players everywhere are friendly and welcoming. Here follows a diary of our "jollies".

1995 - Fifteen years ago, I arranged a visit to Lower Normandy. This was to a private lawn in the village of Le Douet. It was owned by Monique de la Gonfrey who was the "lady" of the village. We were introduced to the delights of Pommeau, a fortified apple drink, and to the lethal spirit Calvados. I don't know if the lawn still exists or not now.

1996 - We went to a club which definitely has vanished, Guernsey, where the lawn used to be at the side of a cricket pitch. We were all put up in a large house overlooking St Peter Port. We then missed two years; at least no-one can remember any visits.

1999 - Our last trip of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was back to Lower

Normandy, Bayeux. This was a visit by several clubs, at the invitation of Bernard Witas, who lives there. It was my job to set the 4 lawns out. Unfortunately it was baking hot and the "lawn" which was a rugby pitch, was like concrete. After struggling with an auger and hammer for about an hour, I lay flat out on the grass. Faith looked out just then and thought I had collapsed in the heat!

2000 - Rosemary Danby recollects, "Ryanair from Birmingham to Dublin - I remember that John Brudenell's mallet stayed at Birmingham airport for the weekend and he collected it on the way back! We were treated to the famous Irish hospitality with lots of food and Guinness. I remember trying on a sweatshirt gift about 10 sizes too big for me".

2001 - "My main memories are of sitting on wet ground watching the fireworks over the Edinburgh Castle in connection with the Tattoo. The lawns, next to a great house, had a magnificent view over the Firth of Forth".

2002 - We then went to Budleigh Salterton. This was at the invitation of Cliff Jones, an honorary Bear, who not only organised the games, but cooked the lunches as well. We still chuckle at the antics of the hotel landlord in Budleigh. He was a real "Basil Fawltly" character. He refused to arrange dinner for us as there were 9 of us and the dining room was only for 8!

2003 - Our visit to Ryde, Isle of Wight was a departure from the norm in that we actually entered a tournament. There were four people in a shoot-out for the peg to win. The Bears who were staying in Ryde were treated to the Ryde Carnival on Saturday evening.

2004 - To another island this time, the Isle of Man. Unfortunately the secretary had forgotten to tell anyone so the IoM only put out a few players. Indeed if Kevin Garrad another honorary Bear had not flown over especially from Holland, there would hardly have been any croquet at all on the very pleasant lawns just outside Douglas. It didn't matter too much as there were so many things to see.

2005 - A home trip next, to Ramsgate, now the home of two far country Bears, Ann and Michael Poole. Our hotel was by the harbour and it was somewhat worrying to find bouncers on the door in the evening.

2006 - Off to Italy, Busto Arsizio. We were rather outclassed as the only Italians there were their top players. On Saturday we were taken some way out of town to what looked like a small local tavern. However, in the back there was a huge room laden with food.

2007 - Another home visit, to St Austell, home of the Cornwall CC. Great hospitality, organised by Tony Backhouse, good croquet and superb views from the next door golf club. Nick Hurst remembers one meal; "the fish and chip supper had to be seen to be believed. The fish the size of a whale, and the chips from a whole field of potatoes".

2008 - Wolkersdorf, near Vienna. Austria has two clubs, this one and one at Salzburg. Considering that this was the most distant club that we had been to it was remarkable that 9 members out of 25 travelled there. We were well rewarded for our efforts as the visit was a spectacular success. Heinz Hackl organised everything, including a visit to Vienna. Here we learnt a new measurement of distance - the Heinz. This is twice the distance the guide says it is! One evening we had a meal in a heuriger, a small farm or similar, where a buffet meal and own-brand wine is served at an extremely reasonable price..

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2009 - This was our Jubilee year and among the events was a Jubilee Jolly to Llanfairfechan in N Wales. They normally only play Golf and short croquet there so I had to do some quick instruction to our members about the game. The hotel where some of us stayed had a superb view over Conwy Bay.

2010 – Yet another island, this time Jersey. A dozen or so Bears went on this trip, some staying for a week. A combination of singles and doubles kept the games flowing. With four lawns, nobody was kept waiting for long so with fine weather we spent a most enjoyable two days. As always, Jersey hospitality was excellent, organised by Paula Le Moignan, and we enjoyed lunches at the sports centre and evenings in La Colomberie (St Helier) and The Smugglers (Ouiasne Bay). The event had an international flavour with Rodolph Dourthe coming over from France to play.

2011 – For the first time we went to the same place again, Wolkersdorf in Austria. Again, there were a dozen of us (half the club). In fact we outnumbered the Austrians and so had to lend them players to make up the doubles. Anyone who doesn't think that Austria is hot should try going in August! Hospitality was terrific

2012 – What this year? This will be a home visit, to Canterbury where we will meet Long-distance Bears Ann and Michael Poole.

For those who would like to see more pictures of our visits, go to our web site at [www.faydon.com/Bear/Jollys.html](http://www.faydon.com/Bear/Jollys.html) Alternatively, other clubs may feel motivated to go on tour now.

## New Third Lawn for Cornwall

By David Edwards



*De-stoning lawn 3, March 2011*

The 2012 season sees a third lawn coming into use at Cornwall. This has been brought about by the generosity of our President, Howard Rosevear, who donated land adjacent to the Club to Children's Hospices South West, for the construction of their new hospice, "Little Harbour". CHSW then generously funded the basic construction of the lawn, on sloping land, by their contractors Midas. The cut and fill operation provided space for a full lawn, albeit with nothing much to spare on the boundaries. This work was finished, including spreading & levelling of topsoil, in autumn 2010. Midas helped further by lending the Club a laser level to

enable the two existing lawns to be accurately profiled. Seeding on lawn 3 followed, a little later than was ideal, even for Cornwall, and cold spells in the winter resulted in a rather slow build-up of grass.

Apart from vertidrainage, carried out when possible by the ground staff of the nearby Porthpean Golf Club, lawn maintenance & improvement work is carried out by Club members. One of the early tasks in March 2011 was de-stoning – a sort of exercise in primitive agriculture!

Fertilising & further work over the summer produced a lawn which came into use in September just for one particularly well supported Golf Croquet Club tournament – the general feeling being that it played pretty well considering its early stage of development. Since then it has been rested, and is now undergoing preparation for full use in 2012. The third lawn will provide greater flexibility, and should mean that a lawn will be available for general Club play during league matches and some Club tournaments.

The Club currently has some 60 playing members, with a strong GC contingent, and a gradually increasing number of members who play both codes. Subject to weather & lawn conditions, one lawn is normally kept open for play throughout the winter, until full closure during March. There is a full calendar of Club tournaments, including well supported short croquet and golf competitions during both the summer and winter. The short croquet seems to provide a good introduction to Association. The Club enters SW Federation league competitions in Golf and Association, and in 2011 won the "B" league final. The Club offers "out of county" membership at a subscription of £30.



*Worthing members celebrate the arrival of their new hut.*

## A new club hut for Worthing

by Don Rush

It is now nearly four years since Worthing Croquet Club moved back to its original home in Field Place, Worthing. Since then our members have enjoyed playing on two excellent three-quarter sized lawns maintained by the local council to the same standard as the adjoining bowling greens.

There has been only one problem. At the time of the move we could only afford, or get permission for, a very small hut in which to store equipment. Over the past three years our members - the majority of whom are in today's parlance "Senior Citizens" – have become very adept at scrambling over hoops, balls and mallets to get at



items stored at the back of the hut.

The need for such feats of gymnastics is now happily over. Having finally obtained permission to erect something more substantial and with the help of a bequest from our late President Pat Shine, and generous contributions from the Croquet Association and Sussex Federation we are the proud possessors of a 10ft x 8ft hut. It may resemble an allotment shed and 'Members Pavilion' is certainly too grand a title for such a modest edifice but it has certainly transformed our lives. Not only is all our equipment readily accessible but we are able to shelter from summer showers without resembling sardines in a tin. The installation of electricity this autumn has meant that our more intrepid members, who continue to play through the winter, can now "brew up" at the end of their session and in the summer we plan to install a small fridge for cooling drinks. So far, however, we have resisted the temptation to install carpet and armchairs!

Although a relatively small club and somewhat in the shadow of the Sussex County Club just a few miles along the coast and, despite competition for members from a newly opened club in the immediate vicinity, we have a vibrant and committed membership. We have always had a strong golf croquet background but are particularly pleased that the number of association players is gradually increasing. Whatever our choice we are all looking forward to our first full season enjoying the comforts of our new "home from home".

## News & Information

### Nominations for Election or Notices of Motions for the 2012 AGM

*The 2012 AGM will be held at Hurlingham on the morning of Saturday, 20<sup>th</sup> October.*

Any nominations for the posts of Hon. Treasurer, Hon. Secretary, membership of Council, or motions to be put to the AGM, should be sent to the Hon. Secretary, Dr. I. G. Vincent, 21, Cedar Avenue, Beeston, Nottingham NG9 2HA, or e-mailed to [ian.vincent@cantab.net](mailto:ian.vincent@cantab.net), by 1<sup>st</sup> June. Nominations should give the name of the candidate together with those of the proposer and seconder, and state that the consent of the candidate has been obtained.

There are expected to be six vacancies on Council. The four retiring members who have indicated that they are willing to serve again (Jeff Dawson, Barry Keen, Tim King and Richard Hoskyns) do not need to be nominated, but at least two additional nominations are required.

### Most Improved Player Awards 2012

Two Association Croquet individual awards are made annually to CA Associates; the Apps Memorial Bowl for the most improved male player and the Steel Memorial Bowl for the most improved female player. In addition, there is an annual golf croquet individual award for CA Associates, the Spiers Trophy, which is awarded to the most improved male or female golf croquet player.

Nominations for these awards should be made by Clubs or Federations and sent to the CA Office by the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2012.

*[Please note that the closing date for subsequent years will be brought forward to the 30<sup>th</sup> November each year.]*

The nomination should provide detailed information about the candidate's improvement during the season (or, in respect of players who join the CA part way through the season, the portion of the season after becoming a CA Associate). Nominations should be accompanied by:

- a copy of the player's handicap card(s),
- a list of tournaments won,
- any peeling achievements, and
- any special circumstances which might be thought relevant.

The award winners are decided by the CA Handicap Committee, whose decision is final, and the awards are usually presented at the CA AGM or at a suitable occasion of the recipient's choosing.

In determining these awards the Handicap Committee will take into account a range of quantitative and qualitative factors. For example (*and for illustrative purposes only*) the Association Croquet Awards might take account of:

- Decrease in handicap,
- Increase in ranking grade,
- Percentage of games won,
- Number of tournaments won,
- Number of games played handicap compared with level,
- Quality of opponents,
- Number of peeling breaks, and
- the extent to which the candidate played just within his/her club or played in tournaments at other clubs.

With the present pattern of play in the domain as a whole, it seems unlikely that handicap play will be especially significant in the award of the Spiers Trophy for the most improved GC player.

### Tournament Regulations

The Tournament Committees are pleased to announce the latest update to the Regulations for Tournaments, which will have taken effect by the time you read this. Most of the changes are for clarification purposes, for example to identify those regulations which only apply to Association or Golf Croquet, but not both.

The main change which is likely to affect UK-based players is that odd-numbered association handicaps above 12 are no longer accepted. This enforces a decision taken recently by the handicapping committee. The other changes are to correct a poorly worded regulation covering the use of bisques after time expires, to extend the "Super-Advanced" trial period and to make it easier for overseas players to comply with tournament entry requirements.

The Regulations are published on the CA website at [www.croquet.org.uk/?p=tournament/regulations.html](http://www.croquet.org.uk/?p=tournament/regulations.html)

### East Midlands Federation Golf Croquet Tournament

The Federation of East Midlands Croquet Clubs is to hold a one day singles "C" Level Golf Croquet Tournament on Wednesday

30th May, for players with a Golf Croquet handicap of 8-12. Entry fee £10. This tournament has been specifically designed to appeal to first time tournament players and improvers. It will be staged at:- Nottingham Croquet Club, Highfields Park, University Boulevard, Nottingham, NG7 2PS.

Play will begin at 10.00 am. Lunch and tea can be ordered on application at £10. Please apply to Eileen Buxton eileen@buxton7404.freemove.co.uk Tel. 01283 703585 for a place or further information.

### Further Merit Awards achieved in 2011

Congratulation to the following players who achieved Merit Awards

#### Bronze Awards

Peter Balchin All England Area Final at Nailsea August  
Andy Brandwood All England Area Final at Nailsea August

#### Bronze & Silver Awards

Roger Loram Ramsgate Handicap Singles July

## CA Committee Reports to the Management Committee

### Coaching

1. Congratulations to Frances Low of Sussex County Croquet Club, who has been named Coach of the Year for 2011. The award certificate is due to be presented at the 2012 Annual General Meeting.

2. Congratulations to Ian Lines of Bowdon Croquet Club, who has chosen for an Outstanding Service Award for coaching. The award certificate is due to be presented at the 2012 Annual General Meeting.

3. After the success of Rachel Rowe in the WCF Women's World Championship, Juniors are reminded of the opportunities available to them under the CA Mentoring Scheme. See the CA website for details.

### Development

1. Demand for development grants continues at a high level.  
2. Local Authority cutbacks are having an increased effect on croquet clubs.

### Handicap Committee

Handicappers should no longer allocate odd number handicaps above 12. Where players have an odd numbered handicap they should now convert to the nearest AHS trigger point.

### Equipment

1. George Wood steel hoops which will be available from the CA shop have been tested and accorded Standard and Championship Approval. An authoritative report of satisfactory use in Australia was taken to satisfy the playing test component of the Approval process.

2. Sustained monitoring of Dawson ball performance has been carried out at Cheltenham (Bernard Neal and Craig Edwards): no evidence of significant alteration has been found. It seems likely that balls will last until accumulating accidental surface damage makes change desirable.

3. Reports of items 1 and 2 will be prepared shortly for the Technical section of the CA Website.

### ICT Committee

1. Further upgrades to the Office IT infrastructure have been made.

2. Backup procedures for the CA Website have been improved.

### International Committee

1. A team is being selected for the November, 2012 WCF GC World Championship in South Africa.

2. The team for the January 2014 MacRobertson Shield will be selected on a date to be agreed.

3. A GB squad is to be established.

### Marketing

1. The CA has again offered sponsorship to the Croquet Cuppers competitions at Oxford and Cambridge.

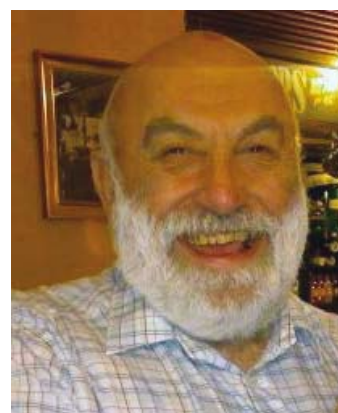
2. Plans are progressing to implement the Growth and Recruitment strategy described in Gazette No. 332.

## News from the Coaching Committee

by Roger Staples,  
Chairman of Coaching

Many clubs are faced with difficult times at present due to the various austerity measures inflicted by local government. Some clubs are also faced with the double whammy of drought and hosepipe bans. There is also the perception that we are a minority sport that is not very competitive.

There is some truth in all of these statements, but now at the beginning of this season, we have a chance to make a difference. All Federations are blessed with some excellent coaches who work hard within their clubs at promoting the game and encouraging thoughtful and stimulating sport. There are also a number of new





clubs emerging whose members, I guess, will not have received very much tuition. They should contact their Federation Coaching Officer or myself who can give them some advice and arrange for coaching sessions to take place.

For Associates, there is the chance to take part in one of the courses run by the Croquet Academy. These courses are aimed at various levels from beginners through to those who wish to learn about the intricacies of Advanced Play. Of particular note is the Supervised High Bisque Tournament on 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> August. This is an ideal introduction to association tournament play, particularly for those who have completed a Bronze or Improvers course. Help will be on hand to advise on the Laws and tactics for using bisques for high handicap players. There will be plenty of experienced players available to consult.

This year also sees a large number of tournaments around the country. Almost certainly, there is one near you. If you haven't partaken before, make this your first step this season. They are very sociable and fun competitions and you will find plenty of encouragement from the other competitors.

We are lucky in having some fine young players. Rachel Rowe's recent success in the 4th WCF Women's World Golf Croquet Championship is just one example. The CA runs a Mentoring scheme to provide one on one coaching and advice for talented young players. If you know of one who could benefit from some help from one of our senior international players, please get in touch with me.

Full details of all the above tournaments and courses are in this year's Fixture Book and on line on the CA website. I wish you all good fortune in the season ahead.

Finally, congratulation to Ian Lines and Frances Low for their recent coaching awards, detailed below.

### Frances Low, Coach of the Year 2011

Frances started playing croquet in 1993 at Rottingdean following an illustrious career as a member of the Sussex County Cricket Club committee and quickly showed her ability with a croquet mallet.

She gained her Grade 1 coaching qualification in 2002 and then progressed to Grade 2 a few years later under the guidance of Brian Teague (A former Coach of The Year). She is also an Association referee. Frances has



done a considerable amount of coaching at SCCC running various internal, SECF & CA courses including coaching at The Summer School. In addition she has also coached at Rottingdean.

When The Academy was formed, Frances agreed to be the Administration Officer. She showed her ability to structure and administer the Academy coaching courses effectively. She also demonstrated an ability as an excellent coach undoubtedly helped by her successful career as a mathematics teacher.

One of her recent highlights was to run an Academy course with her husband for a French club visiting the Academy. The course was conducted in French!

Without her and her husband, John, the Academy would not be the success it is today.

### Ian Lines - Lifetime Coaching Award.

Ian has been a member of Bowdon Croquet Club since 1993 and has progressed quickly within the world of croquet. He is not only an A-Class player but is also a Grade 3 Coach. Although he works, he spends most of his spare time at the club and is always enthusiastic and willing to help anyone to improve their croquet.



Ian Lines

Ian helped to run the Beginners' Course at the club every year for about 15 years, including taking the lead role on a number of occasions. His patience and friendly approach over the 6-week period encourages newcomers to look forward to the following week's lesson. This is one of the most successful beginners' courses in the country and often leads to up to about 20 new members each year.

Ian has led C.A. coaching courses at Gold level and below, around the North West of England as part of the NW Federation's Flying Circus programme of regional coaching. In 2011, despite playing in tournaments most weekends of the year, he still found time to travel to Southport to lead a group of 16 players through a Silver course, assisted by 4 other experienced coaches.

Ian coached and provided individual tuition to a number of players at Bowdon, most significantly in 2011 to the 14 year-old Adam Swinton who went on to win both the North West and National Finals of the All England Handicap Championship. Julie Horsley and Brian Shorney reported on the national final on the CA website, ascribing Adam's victory to his being "very talented and well-coached". During the preceding year, Ian had identified Adam's potential talent and offered to provide some individual coaching to help him develop as rapidly as possible. Ian spent several evenings after work before the All-England regional final providing a wide range of coaching, concentrating on how to maintain a 4 ball break and take bisques effectively, but also taking Adam through all the mechanics of a triple peel to show that it only requires a little thought and control. Indeed, Adam later went on to perform his first triple peel in a club handicap competition, using most of his bisques in the process.

Adam's father, Jonathan, said:

"At the beginning of last year Ian offered unprompted to coach my son and gave generously of his time to do so. Even outside the formal sessions he was always watching Adam play when he could, and offering appropriate feedback, always calmly and quietly and without drama but always authoritative and effective. He took Adam seriously as a player despite his initial handicap. As a direct result Adam won the All England Handicap Championship in Sidmouth last year. I asked Adam, who has just turned 15, for his comments and they speak for themselves:

"Ian gave me a few coaching sessions this season, about a number of topics. He taught me about 3-ball breaks, croquet strokes etc. It definitely helped - from being a 24 for 2&frac12; seasons to going down to 12 was pretty much down to him pointing out what I had done wrong, and helping to improve my game in various aspects. I would say it was down to his giving up some

evenings for me to coach me that I managed to win the All England Handicap; I remember in quite a few games doing something differently to how I would have done 6 months ago, purely based on his advice, and it definitely helped me win. Without his coaching, I would probably still be around a 22-24 handicap".

The development of promising youngsters is vital to the future of croquet, and having relatively young world-class players like Ian providing coaching to potential stars of the future is something that is to be welcomed and encouraged.

## Window on the World Croquet Federation



*By Martin French, Secretary-General*

The WCF – World Croquet Federation – was started by all the largest nations who play croquet in the late 1980s, and the first event was the 1989 World Championship played at Hurlingham and Surbiton.

Today the WCF has 30 Member associations, with Portugal joining this year and India and Latvia last year. The WCF is controlled by its larger Members, including England, and is run on a day-to-day basis by the Management Committee (MC). This nine-person committee includes Amir Ramsis (Egypt, President), Ian Burrige (Wales, Treasurer) and me (England, Secretary-General) as well as 6 other members from England, USA, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa.

You might wonder what there is for the MC to do? There's plenty. We have 8 types of event – singles World Championships for AC and GC, team championships for AC and GC, and various restricted events (Under 21s, Women's, Over 50s). That means about 3 championships in a typical year. We have also built up a huge volume of regulations we are currently taking a scythe to. And there's lots more I'll tell you about in future Gazettes. There's more detail in the monthly WCF Newsletter published on our website.

### What's been happening in January and February?

We have shaken up how the WCF operates and how its Members take decisions in Council. We've moved from an annual meeting somewhere in the world to a continuous email process – making discussion and decisions much easier. This is new from 1<sup>st</sup> January, but already Council has agreed 1) to transfer the administration of the MacRobertson Shield to the WCF, 2) to ratify a number of new shorter versions of specific regulations, and 3) to admit Portugal as a new Member.

Our next big event is the 2012 AC World Championship taking place in Adelaide from 28<sup>th</sup> April to 6<sup>th</sup> May. This will be the 13<sup>th</sup> AC World Championship since that first event in 1989.

After recently reviewing how the computer ranking system worked for Association Croquet (leading to a new formula being introduced from October last year), we have just kicked-off two studies: one looking at the way the GC world rankings are calculated (being led by James Hopgood of Scotland) and another looking at

how we can improve the way the AC and GC rankings are presented on-line (being led by Samir Patel, England). Our aim is to have a very similar format and style for both ranking systems, making them easier and more informative to use.

Next time I'll tell you about two new championships being held for the first time later this year but in the meantime you may wish to consider this event.

### WCF Friends tournament – Ripon Spa Hotel, England

You may recall that in the early days of the WCF, a "WCF Friends" programme ran, through which many people around the world subscribed and helped put the WCF on a firm financial footing. Our President, Amir Ramsis, is keen to recognise their contribution and has arranged with the Ripon Spa Hotel in England to stage a special tournament for WCF Friends.

The tournament will run from Friday 29<sup>th</sup> June until Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> July, using the 3 lawns at Ripon Spa Hotel <http://www.riponspa.com/croquet.php>. The event will be managed by Evelyn Martin. The price for three nights full board accommodation at the hotel and croquet entry fee is £319. There are 16 places available, on a first come, first served basis. Please contact me to reserve a place. [secretary@wcfcroquet.org](mailto:secretary@wcfcroquet.org)

## The 13<sup>th</sup> WCF Association Croquet World Championship Adelaide, Australia April 28th - May 6th 2012

*A Preview By Chris Clarke*

The 13<sup>th</sup> AC worlds is almost upon us and I've been asked to preview the event and ponder the question of for whom will it be lucky 13. There are three main items that I'm going to consider – venue/playing conditions, experience and form/ability.



*The Three R's - Reg, Robert and Robert. Will Reg Bamford or Ro*



This year's event will be held at 10 clubs around Adelaide. Adelaide has a reputation for firm ground and recent reports indicate that the lawns at most venues have been running around 12 seconds. If (and it is an IF) the hoops are set to the same width as the previous 2 worlds in Palm Beach and Christchurch, this should provide good testing conditions. The player with the best record in such testing conditions is Robert Fulford, but it should favour the majority of the higher ranked players. Additionally, home advantage is relevant. It is no coincidence that the 2002 held in Wellington, had a New Zealander in the final, or that the 2008 worlds was won by a local player, or that the 2009 worlds held in Palm Beach had an American finalist. Therefore, the Australians must have their best ever chance of reaching the final, with their top player, by some way, being Robert Fletcher.

Experience is, in my opinion, very important, and here I don't mean having played a lot, I mean having won the event before. Overcoming the mental obstacles to win a world champs is one of the major challenges that players will face. We only have two past Champions in the field – Fulford (5 time champ) and Bamford (3 time champ and defending).

Form/ability is perhaps the least important of the items. With croquet being an amateur sport, many players don't bother to practice for periods and subsequently lose some form. However, most will have put the effort in to attain peak match fitness for a world championship. I was massively impressed with Bamford's performance in the 2011 Open Championship. He not only showed fantastic ball control, but somewhat unusually, shot very well on the first stroke of the turn. If he plays to that standard, he will be difficult to beat. Only one fact is against him – his record in Southern hemisphere worlds. 1997 (Aus) QF, 2002 (NZ) Last 16, 2008 (NZ) Last 32 – a truly dreadful set of results for one of the best players in

the world. Can Reg overcome this trend?

Fulford had a quiet year in 2011 – just the Mens Championship and Presidents Cup!! With the best record in southern hemisphere World Champs, having lost only to Clarke, he will take all the beating if he shoots well. That said, he hasn't won a worlds for 10 years and if either Robert or Reg win, they will become the oldest ever winner.

So, my top 3 picks are Bamford, Fulford and Robert Fletcher – a pretty boring set of choices. I'm now going to pick 2 other players each from Aus, Eng, NZ and The Rest as "ones to watch" and the finish up with my "dark horse".

Australia: With at least 28 players in the event, Australia will certainly provide quantity, but do they have any quality? Well, my top pick is going to be Malcolm Fletcher – semi-finalist in the recent ACA Open and on an upward spiral. Massively aggressive, an excellent shot and an improving tripler, he's one the top players will be hoping to avoid. My second pick is trickier with Forster, Landrebe, Dumergue and Watts all being of interest. Part of me wants to side with Forster's lovely control and elegance, but I'm going to plump for the more volatile Harley Watts – hoping his home lawns will be the key to success.

England: With only 3 of their top 5 (excluding Fulford) playing, this is a slightly weaker English contingent than usual. The four I have actively considered are Beijderwellen, Death, Maugham and



Robert Fulford, two previous winners add their name to the trophy again, or will Robert Fletcher add a new name to the Wimbledon Cup?

Mulliner. My first choice would be Beijderwellen who has an excellent temperament for big matches as he showed when winning the NZ Open. Next I'm going to discount Death because whilst he is massively talented, he is less likely to put together 4 or 5 days of consistently strong performances. So, will it be two-time finalist Mulliner or Maugham who gets my second pick? I'm very tempted by Mulliner because playing conditions may suit him and stop him trying sextuples, but his hoop stroke has become increasingly dodgy over the last couple of years and I'm going to go with the Beast.

New Zealand: Paddy Chapman is an easy first pick – simply higher quality than the other players. Unfortunately, Toby Garrison is missing which is a shame because his recent form has been excellent. I'm going to discount Aaron Westerby because if the hoops are tricky, that is his weakness. Therefore, my second pick must be back to back NZ Open Champion Greg Bryant. Greg is still capable of losing to virtually anyone on the planet, but when he's focussed, is a fine player. To win a NZ Open, being focussed for one or 2 matches is usually enough – he will need 4 or 5 to win a world championship.

The Rest: I guess the first thing to say is that the US players are probably the weakest they have sent for many years. This, combined with a weakish UK contingent, makes it a comparatively weak worlds. Mark McInerney is a compulsory pick. He has always had all the shots, if he can bring the improved temperament he showed in the GC Worlds to AC, then he is someone who the top players will want to avoid. My second pick – tough to choose between Hopgood and Patmore, but I'll take Patmore who can be a tough match player.

Dark horse: One player from outside the top 50. I considered Bruce Fleming and Hamish McIntosh, but in the end I've plumped for a player many won't have heard of. He's a great shot, a lovely fluent player and his form gets better each event – David Wickham.

Finally, good luck to all competitors. The most important thing about a world champs is to enjoy yourself.

Players who wish to keep up to date with what is happening at the Championships can do so via the official website <http://www.croquetworlds2012.org/>

## Points Of View

*Pete Trimmer offers his view on how we might change the old image of Alice and flamingos*

### Comparative Skills

*Pete Trimmer*

When discussing pastimes with someone new, I sometimes come across the reaction, 'Croquet!? Now there's a vicious game!' My standard response is to reply agreeably, 'Yes, it's as vicious as snooker', which tends to get a quick nod of approval followed by a slightly furrowed brow.

When confronted by someone with a bellicose belief that croquet is all about 'flamingos at dawn', it can be useful to compare more directly with other games or sports. The best method I know of was suggested by a backgammon player, Bill Robertie:

Take the best player in the world and call them Player 1. Find someone at a level where Player 1 will typically beat them 75% of the time; call that person player 2. That's one step; repeat the process by finding a Player 3 (who Player 2 would beat 75% of the time), etc., right down until typical beginner level is reached. The total number of steps gives an idea of how complex the game is; the higher the number, the more skilful the game.

Some games have only a small number of steps (e.g., Hearts is 5) but most good games have a complexity rating somewhere between 8 and 12: Draughts and Backgammon are 8, Scrabble, Poker and Bridge are 10, Chess is about 12. (Note these

are based on the winner after several hours of continuous play; to 25 points in Backgammon, best of 5 in Scrabble, etc.)

Thanks to a conflag with the ever-helpful Chris Williams, I can put Association Croquet in a similar bracket; it has a skill rating of 9. (This is based on the top player having a grade of about 2850 and a 24 handicap having a grade of 850 in the Automatic Handicap System. There are 250 points per step, giving 8 steps, with 1 more assumed for players worse than 24, so we get 9 steps. The assumption of 1 game of croquet taking the same as a best-of-5 of competition Scrabble seems reasonable to me.)

With a skill rating between backgammon and bridge, it would be natural to assume that croquet is more tactical than the former and less so than the latter – but this need not be so. Croquet is a game of many skills, both mental and physical. With this in mind, one might expect that croquet would have a higher rating than games like chess, as we have first the skill of deciding where to play and then the added skill of execution. However, the skills are not additive, as we often learn to our cost: a tactical genius will still lose when they can't hit-in or run hoops, especially when they are playing the proverbial (and often



clueless) 'dead-eyed Dick'.

Despite many players' emphasis on the importance of shooting, much of the time, it is the combination of tactical choices with the physical skill of the croquet stroke which wins games for better players. To a



large extent, I believe that this discrepancy between perception and reality comes through a natural observer bias; for instance, with hoops, people don't really notice a sequence of easy hoops being run (created largely by good croquet strokes), but they notice when a difficult hoop is scored or missed (dependent on shooting).

To my mind, there are many sports with more physical skill levels than croquet (e.g., power-lifting has little randomness when it comes to who wins) whilst others have more tactical depth (e.g., Chess or Go). I have yet to find a game with more of both skills - and it is really through the combination: the psychological skill of tuning one's tactics to current playing ability (and that of the opponent), which I think makes our game so interesting.

## Croquet Fiction

### Reflections on Croquet in Wonderland . . . part 2

by Laurence Latham

Continued from the previous issue.

#### The Twins

By this time Alice and I were nearing our next port of call. We could see two ladies who would have been indistinguishable from each other had one not been dressed in green and the other in brown.

"Good morning. Good morning," said Alice politely, and I followed her lead, addressing each of the pair separately.

"I'm Mrs Brown," said the lady who was standing right in the middle of the open doorway.

"And I'm Mrs Green," said the other, who had stationed herself close by. "We are twins, as you will no doubt have noticed."

"Indeed we had," agreed Alice. "You certainly look very much alike."

"Indistinguishable," insisted Mrs Green.

"Identical," confirmed Mrs Brown.

"Be that as it may," said Alice, "could we please ask you to move, so we can go through?"

"No," said Mrs Green. "Your shoes aren't particularly clean."

"Certainly not," said Mrs Brown. "Your hair isn't very tidy and your partner has mud on his trousers."

"How very rude!" exclaimed Alice. "It's not your place to point out such things, even if they are true. And, what's more, you're in our way."

"I'm not rude, I'm just critical," objected Mrs Green.

"And I'm very critical," added Mrs Brown. "We're not moving. Go away and come back later."

Alice came over and whispered to me, "I'm afraid that's what we shall have to do. They must be part of that A Class game the Spy warned us about and they've definitely got it right about being critical. Let's go and wait."

We moved away towards the boundary without offering any valediction.

"They had no need to be so discourteous," muttered Alice. Back at the chairs we found the Hatter talking to a fellow with very tall ears and carrying a notebook.

"That's the March Hare," whispered Alice. "He's a pretty good player, definitely no rabbit."

Without introduction, the March Hare fixed me with a meaningful gaze and flicked open his notebook.

"While the White Rabbit is away being someone else's trophy, I've decided we should hold our own winter tournament here," he announced confidently. "I shall be managing, of course. Would you like to enter? The fee will be two guineas; I'll add it to your bar tab."

"When does it begin?" I asked cautiously.

"December the twelfth at eight o'clock sharp."

"That's awfully early," I exclaimed.

"I could put you down for one of the late starts," offered the March Hare.

"And when would that be?"

"Half past two, on February the fifth. That any use to you? It'll be a very good tournament," he went on, seeing my continuing hesitation. "Level play, but with everybody having eight thousand, one hundred and ninety two bisques."

"Won't that make it all rather pointless?" I ventured.

"Oh, no, no, no!" he said quickly, sensing my erroneous thinking. "The bisques won't be for making breaks; they'll be for making bonfires. The players will need to keep warm; it can get very chilly here at that time of year, you know."

"Look, I may not be able to," I explained, ruefully.

"Well, that's your money gone, then. I can't offer a refund at this late stage, can I?"

Fortunately, before this could go any further, Alice interrupted to say that the twins had left, thereby enabling us to continue on our way.

No sooner had we entered the doorway when a voice called out, "Mind the gates, please!"

It belonged to an officious sounding lift attendant wearing a dark uniform. He looked us up and down with an air of resigned disappointment.

"C Class!" he exclaimed. "You certainly won't be wanting my services, then. This morning's turning out to be a right waste of time. This other lot didn't want me either. Fancy themselves, these sextuplers, if you ask me. Old fashioned lift not good enough any more. Oh, no, prefer to draw a crowd and then take the stares. Stand back, there, if you don't mind."

With that, he pulled the gates together with a crash and his grumbling voice faded away into the distance. The lift had gone.

#### The Prisoner

To my surprise, the next white door we came to swung open automatically with an electrical buzz as we approached it.

"That's different," I commented, and Alice agreed, admitting that, although she undoubtedly had more experience of the place than I did, many things were strange and new to her as well.

"I didn't play much croquet here before and, besides, I'm sure it wasn't to such serious rules," she confessed. "Oh, my goodness! Who are you?"

A man was regarding us with a good degree of suspicion. He was dressed in smart trousers, turtleneck pullover and a dark

blazer with contrasting edging around its borders. For once, I was ahead of the game.

"You are Number Six!" I exclaimed.

"I am not a number, I am a free man," he growled. "What do you want?"

"We want," I began, aware that Number Six was regarding us with a steely expression, "to get to the beginning of the game."

"You started at the end?"

"Yes. This is a very queer place."

"Agreed, but I don't believe you; that would mean you got past Rover. You're just another of Number Two's little tricks. You're plants!"

"No, we are *not*," cried Alice. "I've been through this 'Animal, Vegetable, Mineral' thing before."

This particular interjection seemed to transform his whole attitude in a trice.

"Very well," he said cordially. "Whatever you do, keep going until you're beyond the reach of Number Two. After that it's up to you." He showed us to the door and gave a curt wave. "Be seeing you!"

After that, progress was remarkably swift, with the majority of folk quickly getting out of our way as they saw us approaching. It was a most amazing change, for we were soon through doors that earlier we would have considered serious obstacles.

"What's happening?" I asked Alice, feeling both pleased and puzzled.

"The game is easier this way round," she explained, "even beginners usually make some progress at the start."

Once safely past the imposing entrance to Number Two's residence, we paused and looked about us.

## To Tickets and Trains

"One more door," gasped Alice, trying to recover her breath. "The blue one, over there."

We passed through the final doorway to enter a room of most singular appearance. On the far side stood a large reception desk, with what I initially took to be a white horse sitting behind it. When the creature looked up, however, I saw that it had a solitary horn protruding from its forehead.

"I'm so pleased you could make it," said the Unicorn. "We don't get too many here from your direction. I'll just get you your complimentary tickets."

"Tickets?" I enquired at this unforeseen turn of events.

"Why, yes, your train tickets, of course. You'll need them to get home. I'm afraid the station is some way east of here, and once there you must make absolutely sure you catch a Baulk Line train."

"So croquet is a bit like chess," exclaimed Alice. "I had to catch a train in that, too." She paused, both pleased and surprised at her unexpected memory. "Only then there wasn't a ticket office and I nearly got into trouble. I think this is much better."

The Unicorn handed us our tickets, eyeing me closely. "You look quite worn out," he observed.

"I am pretty tired," I confessed. "It's been a long game. As soon as we've finished I'm going to lie on the grass."

"Lion the Grass?" spluttered the Unicorn in sudden outrage. "We've had our differences and many a good fight, but I certainly didn't have him down as a snitch! I would never have shared that plum-cake with him if I'd thought..."

"I said I was going to - lie - on - the - grass," I repeated slowly.

"Well, I wish you'd make yourself clear from the start," said the Unicorn sulkily. "I might have made a false accusation and handed him the moral high ground. He has enough advantage over me as it is, in the mane."

I had to admit he had a very good point.

Our walk to the station was without incident and it wasn't long before we were able to board our train. We waited patiently for some time but still we failed to get under way. Eventually, when the guard happened to walk past, I managed to waylay him and enquire as to what was going on.

"Sorry for the delay, sir, madam," he apologized. "Should be off soon, but it seems there's been some difficulty with the points."

"What sort of difficulty?" I pressed, irritated at this unexpected setback.

"Oh, apparently they don't add up or something, sir. It's all beyond me; I work for the train operator, you see. We don't keep track of points any more; that all comes under a different organization now. But, if it's any help, I did hear it's to do with a missing clip or some such nonsense. 'For the want of a nail' and all that... I'm sure we shall be on our way soon."

Indeed, after several more minutes we did finally get going but, before hardly having time to rejoice in our progress, we felt the train slowing down again and sure enough we soon came to another complete halt amid a prolonged squeal of brakes.

"Now what?" complained Alice.

In due course, I saw the guard coming back. "What is it this time?" I called. "Leaves on the line?"

"Got it in one, sir!" announced the guard. "I thought you might ask, so I made enquiries. Apparently it's to do with an important game; First Class, I think."

"A Class," corrected Alice.

"All right, A Class, then, or whatever you want to call it. Well, they have these here special leaves, all complicated type of thing and not to be disturbed; so the likes of us have no choice but to wait." He sauntered off down the corridor, grumbling to himself about privileged classes.

"I'm sure there wasn't nearly as much trouble the last time I was on a train here," observed Alice, "even when I didn't have a ticket. I'm beginning to think this isn't so much better after all."

At the end of our somewhat fraught journey we made our



way out of the rather smoky station, handing our used tickets to the collector at the gate.

"We're very sorry for the delays and inconvenience," he declared politely, "but, as your tickets were free, I'm pleased to tell you that under the circumstances you are entitled a full refund of the cost. Would you like claim forms?"

"No, thank you," replied Alice wearily. "I'm sure *nothing* would be too much trouble for your company."

## The Barbeque and the Cat

Outside, we were surprised to find the atmosphere was even smokier than in the station.

"Oh, look," exclaimed Alice in delight, "that must be the Chimneypotamus; it's coming from his barbeque."

"Sausage?" he offered, as we approached, enthusiastically waving something black on the end of a long fork. It wiggled back and forth, leaving a rather endearing little trail of smoke zigzagging in its wake.

"Um, no, thank you," declined Alice, albeit a little afraid she might disappoint him. "But we did very much want to meet you."

We continued chatting for a while to the Chimneypotamus, who expressed great interest in the game of croquet, but when people who were genuinely in search of food began to gather round, we felt it appropriate to move out of the way.

"It's been a real pleasure meeting you," he beamed. "The charcoal biscuits are over there; please, do help yourselves."

"He sounded quite keen," enthused Alice, once we were away from the barbeque (and the charcoal biscuits). "I really think he might begin to play!"

"I can't see him in whites, somehow," I observed, a little dryly.

"Don't be so judgmental," admonished Alice. "People can change, you know."

I felt suitably chastened, even though I had intended my remark to be taken largely in jest.

"Take the Ace of Spades," Alice continued, unaware of my contrition. "When he first saw a croquet lawn he wanted to dig it up to grow fruit bushes. Now he's a great advocate of the game. Oh, look, I do believe they've met!"

Back by the barbeque, the Ace and the Chimneypotamus were laughing and joking like old friends. At one point, the Chimneypotamus became so carried away that he allowed the kipper tie which he was wearing (perhaps a little unwisely) to dangle on to the fire. A glowing orange line began to ascend it, rather in the manner of blue touch paper, and the Ace went flying into action. Grabbing a jug of water which had sensibly been kept at hand, he threw it over the smouldering tie, only for a goodly quantity to land on the barbeque, causing a loud hiss and a great cloud of steam.

"That's added mist to the grill," whooped the Chimneypotamus, hastily removing what was left of his neckwear.

We decided to leave them to it and were beginning to wander towards the Clubhouse when I became aware that we were being observed by a rather large cat apparently sitting upon nothing, about fifteen feet up in the air.

"What on earth is that?" I enquired, somewhat startled.

"That's the Cheddar Cat," explained Alice. "He's taken to sitting up there since he was banned from entering tournaments. But you needn't worry about him; he'll probably vanish again in a minute or two."

There were several questions I wanted to ask at once.

"How did he get up there?"

"He climbed the cedar tree, of course. How do you think?"

"But there's nothing there," I protested.

"Well, there was when he climbed up, but now it's disappeared. That's why it's called the cedar tree; because you can't."

"Can't what?"

"Cedar tree any more, obviously. Must I go on explaining everything?" frowned Alice.

"Yes, I'm afraid you're going to have to. This place still has me totally confused; it's completely bizarre. Yet there was something you just said which... oh, I don't know. Please, do carry on."

"Very well," conceded Alice, drawing a deep breath. "Look, it's like this: as I'm given to understand, the Cheddar Cat originally came here with an Oxford professor and has been around on and off ever since. He learnt to play and quickly got down to scratch - almost all cats do, as I'm sure you know - but that was the trouble. Every time he entered an event he would end up scratching. He became a manager's nightmare and had to be banned, so now he just watches, usually from up there."

Once again I looked up at the cat, which seemed to be blurring round the edges. "What's happening now?"

"He's leaving. Like most cats, he wanders off from time to time. He'll gradually fade away until there's only a strand of DNA left, hence both his attachment to the Oxford professor and his being called the Cheddar Cat."

"How exceedingly weird!" I exclaimed.

"Not at all," protested Alice. "Lots of things vanish but leave traces of DNA. I should have thought you would know that. Come to think of it, our cat Dinah was mostly DNA."

"I felt I almost did know something for a second or two back there," I declared thoughtfully, "but it seems to have gone again. Just like the Cheddar Cat."

All at once there was something of a commotion as the White Rabbit appeared carrying a bell and calling for everyone to make way. He was leading an entourage at the centre of which walked a most striking looking lady possessed of whitish hair crowned with golden highlights.

"Who's that?" I asked Alice in a hushed tone, fearing others might become aware of my ignorance.

"That," she replied in an equally low voice, "is the Queen of Puddings."

The procession halted.

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“What is all this smoke?” demanded the Queen. “You there, step forward!” she added, immediately spotting the Chimneyopotamus, who was trying unsuccessfully to hide behind a spatula. “Why is there such pungent cooking going on out here, and at this hour?”

“We’re having a barbeque, may it please your Majesty,” explained the Chimneyopotamus uncertainly.

“We are not at all sure that it does please us,” observed the Queen. “These people will be left with very little appetite for sweetmeats!”

There was a general mumble of respectful denial.

“Very well,” allowed the Queen, “be sure to eat cake at teatime.”

To this, there arose a somewhat louder murmur of affirmation.

The Queen turned her direct attention once more to the Chimneyopotamus.

“And what, may we ask, young man, do you intend to do about reducing your carbon footprint?”

“I shall clean my shoes more frequently, your Majesty.”

“Highly commendable. Most astute. We are minded to offer you the contract to oversee the efficient running of all our flues and chimneys. If you agree, the White Rabbit will deal with the paperwork immediately.”

“Thank you, your Majesty, I am most grateful,” exclaimed a delighted Chimneyopotamus, bowing (though not so low as to risk being overbalanced by his relatively sizable nose).

The White Rabbit hurried forward to oversee the written formalities, which he then tried to conduct, rather awkwardly, at arm’s length.

That finished, the Queen of Puddings declared it was time for tea and the White Rabbit began loudly ringing his bell.

## Tea

And it really was the tea bell, after all.

## Epilogue

My head still slightly fuzzy, I remained sitting where I was for a minute, watching the tournament players, clad in white, competing on the tidy, regulation courts with neat boundaries and narrow hoops. I contemplated the empty space where a cedar tree had stood for so many years, and marvelled at how elements of reality can infiltrate the most outlandish dream.

I carefully picked up my fallen reading material, which consisted of a combined edition of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* and a recent copy of the *Croquet Gazette*.

Despite the total absurdity of it all, I knew there was something else I had to do before thinking about tea. Like a young child forced to look under the bed after waking from a nightmare, I headed for the empty bar and, once there, furtively checked my tab.

# Obituary



## John Lonsdale

John Lonsdale died on 6th February 2012 following diagnosis of cancer.

John was born in London in 1928 and had a successful career in engineering, which latterly brought him to Bournemouth.

He and his wife Jill went to an Open Day at East Dorset Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club in 1991. John to try tennis, and Jill croquet. John also tried croquet and was hooked, and they both joined as croquet members and had beginners’ coaching.

John progressed rapidly and being very competitive, played at many Clubs around the country. He represented East Dorset in the South Western division and was Captain of the Longman Team only last year.

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The Manor House, 1 Barn Croft, Penwortham, Preston PR1 OSX



John was a much respected Chairman of the Croquet Section for 4 years and on the Club Executive Committee right up to his death.

He was a Club Coach, a Referee and organised the mentoring scheme for new members, which has been so successful.

John's input to the Club at all levels has been immense. His help and kindness to players, from beginners to A-class players, has been much appreciated.

A Clubman in the true sense of the word, he will be forever remembered and greatly missed.

*Peggy Nutland*

### David Henderson Price 1916-2011

David Price who died on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2011 left behind a fine record of service to croquet. He probably learned the game, as did many others, at the renowned Cober Hill guest house where he continued to play into his late 80s. He was one of the committee which formulated the unique rules of the game played there.

David was a Mancunian but moved to the North East at the request of the chairman of GEC for whom he worked as a marketing specialist. He stayed on after retirement and it was natural that, when Syd Jones as North East Development Officer for the CA advertised for croquet players to form a club in Northumberland, he should respond. English Heritage was keen to establish croquet on an old croquet court at their site at Belsay Hall and in 1989 a club was formed there with David as its first chairman and with 7 other members. New members were warmly welcomed and more joined in the first season.

David proved an ideal chairman leading by courteous example and always ready to help members improve their play. He maintained good relations with English Heritage and supported Croquet North and the CA., encouraging members to join. He expected players to observe the rules and the etiquette of croquet and insisted on their wearing white. Under his firm guidance the Club went from strength to strength until, when he resigned the chair before moving to Norfolk in 1996, membership had risen to 50 and members were playing in regional and national competitions.

David's main object was to ensure that everyone enjoyed playing competitively but fairly, as friends. This was the ethos of the club which has been maintained by subsequent chairmen. Very competitive himself he enjoyed a challenging game. He was the master of adventurous shots and in one game he ran 4-back, penult and rover in one turn- with one ball! This gave rise to the club catch phrase of "Doing a David" for any daring hoop shot.

At the AGM of Croquet North in 1996 the chairman Derek Trotman presented David with a trophy for outstanding service to Croquet in the North of England. The following year he was presented with a National award as the Senior Sports Personality.

At the last Club AGM prior to his move David and his popular wife Janet, "the Picnic Queen", were elected honorary members and he was invited to become Honorary Life President. It pleased his friends at Belsay that while keeping up his croquet in Norfolk he never forgot the club he founded.

*Charles Topaz*

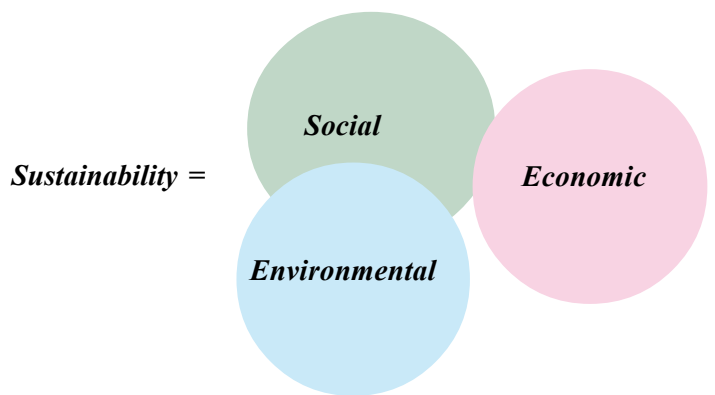
## Development

### How Green is Your Croquet Club?

*By David Mooney, C.A. Development Committee*

Do green issues affect your croquet club? You may think we only use our club during the summer so we don't need to heat the Pavilion. We don't have air conditioning so our energy usage is next to zero. However, direct energy usage is not the only consideration to being a truly sustainable club. True sustainability is made up of what is known as triple point baseline with three factors.

The questions you should ask yourself with any major decision your club makes is does an improvement meet our;



*Social requirements* - does the end product address our cultural, functional and our stakeholders needs?

*Economic* - can we afford it terms of both capital and running costs?

*Environmental* - does the end result have any negative environmental consequences?

Croquet by its nature has strong sustainable qualities, it is an active sport open to an older demographic, it does not need substantial investment compared with other sports and it has a relatively minimal environmental impact.

The only environmental aspects croquet clubs will need to watch regularly are the water and chemical needs of the courts.

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Water usage will become as critical as energy usage into the next decades. Can clubs get their water needs from sustainable sources such as grey water collection, boreholes, or ground aquifer extraction?

The costs of projects pose greater challenges in the current economic climate. Are clubs going to be able to count on their current income and can they develop in a sustainable manner and what are the external criteria that the clubs cannot control?

The CA Development Committee is now able to award grants up to £10,000 and this will encourage clubs to take on larger projects. These larger projects, if they involve buildings, will be covered by the Building Regulations and in most cases the planning regulations. This will mean that the projects will have to be energy efficient and address the wider sustainable issues. These environmental issues will normally be benchmarked against the Building Research Establishment Energy Assessment Method (BREEAM) and planning authorities will be looking for either a good or excellent Breeam rating.

What measures might a club take to get a better rating?

Compost all organic waste.

Look to use organic fertilizers

Look to save all waste water.

See if you could sink a borehole or get extraction rights from a local stream.

Look to install roof lights to minimise lighting needs,

If a new club, see if you can site your club close to public transport.

Some clubs such as Ember CC and Surbiton have already taken steps in this area and the committee is currently evaluating plans in a similar vein from Nottingham.

The development committee will be formulating a sustainability policy in the near future and are likely to require more information on sustainability aspects of projects before awarding grants this requirement is in line with other funding organisations.

We would welcome feedback from members on sustainability issues. Correspondence should be sent to [adavidmooney@sky.com](mailto:adavidmooney@sky.com)

## Lawn Advice

### Letchworth - the creation and maintenance of two fine croquet lawns.

By Duncan Hector

Croquet players want a flat surface (boundary to boundary), decent hoop approaches, a reasonably fast surface (but not so fast that ball-positioning becomes a lottery), and no rabbit runs. This is the story of how Letchworth Croquet Club achieved all this from scratch, and without irrigation. All the recommendations made in this article apply to the conditions at Letchworth and may not be applicable to other soil structures.

Thanks to grants from the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation and the Croquet Association we were able to create two new croquet lawns at Letchworth in 2005. All subsequent groundwork has been done by club members after we had bad experiences with contractors. The two lawns are now amongst the finest non-irrigated

lawns in the UK. They are impressively flat, fast and true although there is still room for improvement which will happen with further annual top dressing.

The Sports Turf Research Institute drew up the original plans, went out to tender and managed the construction phase. The original site was on a slope so the top soil was removed, the sub soil laser levelled and top soil replaced. The soil was worked into a fine tilth, mechanically stone picked, levelled and 76 tons of sand ameliorated into the top two inches (that is about an inch of sand added to the top two inches). The lawns were designed to have no slope at all for drainage as it wasn't considered necessary. The only drainage installed was a catch drain between the tennis courts and croquet lawns. We have a well structured top soil free of stones which drains well except after a deluge of the exceptional type. A few feet down there is a solid band of clay some 35 feet thick. Ominously the address of the new Croquet Club at Letchworth is Muddy Lane.

**Clay and water:** The clay holds the water and gives some drought protection.

**Clay and cracking:** In the first three years of maturing we experienced cracking below the surface during drought conditions. This produced an uneven surface enough for balls to bounce and was rather worrying. We thought the only solution was irrigation. But from the fourth season onwards this cracking has not recurred even though the conditions have at times been much drier. It seems that the roots have matured and formed a considerable structure which either masks or prevents the cracking.

**Sand:** In the first two years particularly the sand produced a very fast draining surface. As the sward has matured this free draining seems to have gone backwards a little but not seriously. We use Leighton Buzzard washed sand which has round granules which have more air spaces when compacted than sharp sand. It is used at Woburn Golf Club for their 36 greens. It comes from a pond and equivalents may be river sand that I have seen advertised but I don't know. This very free draining surface means that nutrients are absorbed and wash through very quickly so considerably more nitrogen has to be provided in the early stages of maturing.

**Bad advice:** We were badly advised by three contractors about the maintenance of our new lawns. I learnt that each contractor has his own ideas and they definitely don't agree with one another. STRI consultants don't agree with each other and agronomists can disagree with everyone too. This makes it tricky so I end up relying on what I know works. Inappropriate machinery was used by contractors causing valleys where the tractor tyres ran. I am simply astonished that these people can actually earn a living by doing such a poor job.

**Agronomy and turf care:** We don't employ an agronomist. The people who supply our Turf Care Products have very knowledgeable sales reps. Ours comes when called and can diagnose any problem and propose a solution. He works out an annual programme covering all our requirements. This has changed as the lawns have matured.

**Grass – Sauvignon:** Yes Sauvignon was the name of the Dwarf Rye grass that was initially sown when the lawns were



constructed. Letchworth was among the first croquet clubs to take this radical step. People think of Bents and Fescues in connection with fine turf and they are right. But our needs are rather more demanding. We want a grass plant that will withstand a lot of wear particularly around hoops. It must also withstand dry conditions because we don't intend to use irrigation. Around 2004 I discussed the virtues of rye grass with the Head Groundsman at Hurlingham and was surprised to hear that he had overseeded the croquet lawns with Sauvignon. It has been used at Wimbledon for years and major cricket grounds too. Our experience has been very good indeed. I don't think Sauvignon is available now and more recently we have been using the brand Bar Extreme.

**Living, breathing surface:** To get a good surface you have to consider the welfare of the top few inches of soil – this is where the roots collect the nutrients. Top soil is top soil because it is living and breathing. Sub soil does not live and breathe. A handful of topsoil is full of all sorts of things – thousands of fungi spores and vast numbers of micro-organisms. Grass roots love a lively medium where things are going on and if the action is deeper down, that's where the roots go. THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT. At Letchworth we do not top dress with anything other than pure sand. The reason is that if we add nutrient-rich soil to the top, the roots will concentrate their growth exactly there, near the top. To get strong grass you need deep rooting grass plants. Roots are single minded, their job is to locate water and nutrients, if you provide these at the surface they will stay there waiting for more. That is why if you are irrigating you must really soak the grass so that the water gets down deep. A living breathing surface needs oxygen to work well. This is easily provided by regularly aerating. We use a Sarel Spiker which has thin spikes that penetrate a couple of inches or so (see below). The Sarel is a good implement because it doesn't disrupt the surface at all which is important at a busy club where play goes on for up to eight hours a day seven days a week.



**Check it out:** You can easily check the health of your lawn by taking out a plug of soil; this can be done with the proper device or use a penknife to cut a pyramid of soil which can be heeled back after inspection. Look to see how deep the roots are growing. Three to four inches is good. Roots will develop round and in the spiked holes where there is plenty of oxygen. Monthly aeration is recommended but our lawns get too hard in midsummer for any depth of penetration, so we spike after rain when it is softer.

**Worms and crows:** There are some 28 species of worm found in UK soil of which only four are of the casting variety. They are surface feeders and are the ones that can ruin your fine lawn. Chemical control (we use Ringer) is currently available but may not be in the longer term if regulations change. Crow damage is one of our problems. They dig holes in the grass all over the place. What they like are Leather Jackets which are the larva of Daddy Long Legs. Again, this is easily cured and the best month is November when we use a product called "Crossfire" for this purpose.

**Growth regulator:** We have been using a growth regulator (Primo Maxx) for two seasons. This is sprayed in a mixture of liquid farmyard manure (Farmura) which percolates down into the soil to get the micro-organisms going and to provide nutrients to the roots. The growth regulator causes the grass to adopt even more of a dwarf habit and encourages sideways growth rather than vertical and root development too. It really works and reduces the amount of mowing necessary. The grass looks as though it has just been cut for longer and gives a faster surface too.

**Nitrogen:** Hitherto we have used granular slow release fertilisers but they do rely on rain to water them in which can be very difficult to forecast and inconvenient. Last year we used slow release granular at the beginning and end of the season but liquid spray throughout the main season. The downside with liquid is that there is no slow release. However the nitrogen is absorbed by the leaf immediately. This does conflict with the theory that the roots are looking for nutrients deep down but we rely on our farmyard manure to do this job. Experience has shown that this approach has been very successful. We use an SCH sprayer (see below) that is towed by our lawn tractor. It has a capacity of 180 litres and the pump is powered by the tractor battery.



**Thatch:** This is dead or dying material and roots in the top layer of the sward. It needs to be removed by scarifying which we do every autumn. We haven't done it in the spring because we are usually nurturing areas of new growth and don't want to rip up newly germinated grass plants. Furthermore, as we have no irrigation it would be suicide to scarify in the spring because the grass will not recover if the weather is dry in late spring/early summer. A number of clubs have made this mistake and suffered with a very poor surface for most of the season as a result. Scarifying is best done in two passes. Do the second pass at something like a 20 degree angle to the first NOT 90 degrees which

will create square boxes and lines that can spoil your surface. We use a Countax powered scarifier that fits on the back of our Countax lawn tractor.

**Mowing:** This is shared by two or three of our members headed by George Woolhouse. George does a “club” cut which is a once over cut or a “match cut” which is two passes usually at opposing diagonals. For years we have used a 24” ATCO ride on which couldn’t cut lower than about 6 or 8 mm. Now that we have flat lawns we want a faster surface and have purchased an Allett Tournament 24 mower (see below) with the help of a grant from the Letchworth Heritage Foundation. The manufacturer modified their standard mower to take our old ATCO seat and also fitted a larger collecting box (the standard one is very small). This mower has a shaver blade that can cut down to 2 mm, it is easy to operate, vibration free and cuts very finely at 246 cuts per metre. An important asset is the fact that this mower has a groomer device which flicks the grass and other stuff up into the blades. George has experimented with the groomer. He cut one section with the groomer and another section without. Both sections were cut the same length but the section that had been groomed was 3 Plummers faster. Allett tell me that Bowls Clubs have been reporting this too. The significant advantage is that grass can be kept longer than normally possible without losing speed. Longer grass is stronger grass and has better resistance to drought and disease.



**Hoops:** Our club is very active with both AC and GC. To prevent rabbit runs and to rest the grass George Woolhouse developed a rotation system of hoop settings which works very well. There are two main settings, one for AC, the other for GC. The AC setting is in the standard position and the GC setting is about a foot to one side. So that we can rest these, we create another setting two or three feet away longitudinally. When the second setting is used we move the boundary lines to match. The holes are never in-filled except when we top dress because of the fear that hills would develop. They

rarely seem to be a problem to players.

**Top dressing:** This is done in the autumn using a lawn tractor pulling a trailer filled with sand. We have been applying 20 tons a year in order to get the lawns flat – but in future we will reduce this to 10 tons. The sand is shovelled from the trailer onto the grass and a 12 foot aluminium ladder is dragged around to spread it. This acts as a large lute and has enabled us to achieve an excellent standard of flatness. Although we apply seed before top dressing we also have to oversee the thickly dressed areas and a further overseed is usually necessary in these areas in the spring. The use of a germination mat can protect the seed from birds and warm the soil too. Normal white garden fleece does this job well – simply peg it down over the offending area and water as necessary. It can be removed and replaced before and after play if necessary. Rye grass needs a temperature of 9 °C to germinate, so that is the deciding factor with timing. Our experience has shown that very thick amounts of sand can lead to problems, because the sand doesn’t hold moisture, so in areas where deep top dressing is required I would recommend a 60/40 sand/soil mix topped off with pure sand.

**Red Thread:** I have seen this at lots of clubs and we get attacks at Letchworth from time to time. It is the result of a fungus that is ever present in the soil. The spores just wait until you provide the right conditions for it to do its work and then it produces pinkish/red threads. It indicates a nitrogen shortage and so the cure is simple.

**Snow mould:** We had unexplained white patches all over the lawns in February 2011. It turned out to be snow mould which is a fungal attack resulting from snow lying on the surface. It soon disappeared with no remedial action necessary.

**Dry patch:** This has been a problem for the last two seasons. During very dry periods micro-organisms produce a waxy substance which binds the particles of soil together forming a totally waterproof surface. Having done that, the roots dry out and your grass dies. Even after two inches of rain the water didn’t get through. We took soil samples from affected areas and the soil below was just like dust and absolutely dry as a bone. Yet a few inches away where the area wasn’t affected, the soil was healthy and moist. We now incorporate a wetting agent in our spraying programme. I think there is another factor which is the maturity of the rootmass and it seems that the developed areas don’t suffer from this problem. The areas where there has been deep top dressing with a less developed sward seem to be more prone to dry patch.

**Fusarium patch:** This is a fungal attack that creates white rings and patches. It happens in the darker winter months but disappears in the spring. We haven’t had to use any remedial measures.

**Purple patch:** This is not fungal nor is it a disease. You will know if you have it because you will hit every long shot and run every hoop with ease.

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