

THE

APRIL/MAY 2011

# CROQUET

GAZETTE



## 2011 season springs into action

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How the post WWII era of croquet in England came to be of such great interest to a staunch baseball fan in the United States

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ISSUE 331



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## CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN APRIL 2011

I hope that you have noticed the increase in advertising in this month's Gazette. This is the first issue produced for us by an Agency that raises advertising with the aim of reducing the production costs. This is a trial for the next three issues. If it is successful, then we may see a permanent and possibly significant reduction in the CA's costs. I must emphasise that the CA retains full editorial control.

This month I wish to tell you about the many and various activities of our Committees over the winter. The results of the deliberations were considered at the January and March Council meetings and the items in the following paragraphs were agreed.

A new overall strategy for the CA was agreed. This will offer guidance to the main committee chairmen when they develop their aims for the coming seasons. The Management Committee will monitor the committees' activities against this strategy annually.

A cross committee group has been looking at the make up of the players coming into the game in recent years with the aim of producing a strategy for recruiting new players to the game in the future. This has recommended that the CA develop a marketing strategy aimed at attracting competitive players to take up croquet. Various detailed recommendations were made and will be acted on.

Following the new world teams competition last year, it has been decided that, in the future, the CA's team in the MacRobertson Shield will represent England. This decision was taken following discussions with the other home countries which will now be able to enter the competition in their own right.

In the past, the maximum development grant has normally been limited to £5,000. It has now been agreed that grants of up to £10,000 will be considered for the development of four or more lawn clubs. The main aim of these grants is to provide new facilities for holding tournaments and internationals

Work has been ongoing in developing a new financial strategy. However, this has been put on hold pending the outcome of the Gazette production trial. One change that has been agreed is that as from 1st August, new tournament members of the CA will be entitled to a discount for the first two years. It is hoped that this will attract more new players to the tournament scene.

In addition to the above items, the main committees have been attending to their normal business as usual.

I therefore hope that all these activities demonstrate how the CA actively supports, and helps to develop, the game of croquet. I trust that the above items will help you to give an informed answer to the question: 'What does the CA do?'

*Barry Keen*

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FRONT COVER: Coaching in progress at Bamburgh CC. Photo by James Edgar

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### DISCLAIMER

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

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Welcome to the new look Gazette. I'd like to say the process of change has been frustration free, but I'm afraid it has had its moments. Producing the publication without being able to 'see' it has been 'interesting' to say the least. I'm sure I will get used to it in due course, as my sixth sense develops, along with grey hair.

I would like to thank all of the Club secretaries who rallied to the call for copy last month. I was very pleased to see that ownership of the Gazette is being re-claimed, and that so many people worked within relatively tight deadlines to get their news to me. I very much appreciate your efforts. I sincerely hope that this spirit of active ownership continues, as it would appear that some of the respondents seemed genuinely surprised that their small clubs had even been asked. As Editor I can categorically state that all clubs, no matter how big or small, are always welcome to contribute, as is any individual, regardless of handicap or experience.

There is, I feel, a good selection of copy in this issue and would hope that this will continue throughout the coming season. I would like to remind tournament reporters new and old that reports are welcome, but also that the date and venue of the events are very helpful to me, as are captions for any photo attached.

Prof Alan Pidcock has kindly provided an article on the care of mallets at my request, so that players start the season with their mallet if not themselves in tip-top condition. Ian Vincent has provided an update on Tournament Regulations, David Mooney has provided another coaching article for the less experienced. So all in all, with a following wind and some Easter sunshine, I wish you all an enjoyable and successful season.

*Gail Curry*

*Editor*  
The Croquet Gazette.

## NEWS FROM THE OFFICE

### CHEQUE REPLACEMENT

On 7 March 2011, the CA Manager, Elizabeth Larsson, attended a seminar held at the Payments Council about the proposed replacements for cheques in 2018. The Payments Council is currently working towards a solution, and is consulting with various groups, including sporting governing bodies. A full report of the meeting will be in the next issue.

### TOURNAMENTS

Entries for tournaments are coming in thick and fast, both for clubs and individuals. Our usual plea is to ensure that the events you are entering are clearly marked, as 'Opens' doesn't really tell us which one.

### MEMBERSHIP

Individual members have until the end of April to renew their membership, otherwise it automatically lapses. Final reminder letters will be sent out during April.

### CLUBS

Clubs have been renewing their membership and with it the all-important public liability insurance. Clubs have until the end of May to renew their memberships.

### CA SHOP

The CA Shop has a wide variety of mallets available and supplies hoops, balls, books, laws books etc. The shop is now the agent in the UK for Fenwick Elliot Mallets. Customers are welcome to visit, but please make an appointment – call 01242 233555

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## TOURNAMENT REGULATIONS FOR 2011

The Tournament Regulations, which apply to all events in the tournament calendar, have been amended for the 2011 Season. The regulations can be found on the CA website at the following address: <http://www.croquet.org.uk/?p=tournament/regulations.html>.

There have been two principal changes:

- Appendix 1 (Hoop Setting)—the guidance for hoop setters has been updated based on the latest advice and is recommended to all clubs. As advertised last year, hoop tolerances have been redefined.
- Regulation R (Refereeing) has been re-written. The new regulations have been agreed internationally for Association Croquet by the International Laws Committee, and have been extended to cover Golf Croquet refereeing in the UK. Ian Vincent explains these changes in more detail elsewhere in this edition of the Gazette.

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# Letters

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## A NEW LOOK GAZETTE

Most readers will immediately have noticed that the magazine has had a significant make-over, looking and feeling rather different from before. Following Liz Larsson's initiative, the Publishing Committee has agreed to try a different method of producing the Gazette, using a 'customer publisher'. Bamboo House (Bath) will now be responsible for all external advertising and design/layout work, both aspects of course being subject to our approval. BH will initially bear most of the costs of printing & distribution (using our current providers). We have agreed on a trial involving the April, June and September issues, continuing if successful and leading to further cost savings. However this is, for the CA anyway, a change in the way of working. People contributing reports, articles and letters will have to observe published deadlines (preferably anticipating them), so that the Editor can ensure she has all the desired content, in the right form and at the proper time.

*Charles Waterfield*

## AN INTERACTIVE ALTERNATIVE

Some people find Association Croquet too uninteractive, especially once players are competent at playing breaks. Some others are put off changing from Golf Croquet to Association Croquet because they want to be on the lawn more often. So here is a suggestion of a change to Association Croquet to make it more interactive: after every 10 strokes of a break, the outplayer is allowed to play one stroke, with either of his balls. No roquets can be made and no continuation strokes are allowed, but they can hit their ball into a corner, or clear another ball away, or join partner, or score a hoop or peg point. Then the first player carries on with their break, except that this may be difficult if the ball they were expecting to roquet is now in a distant corner of the lawn, or blocked by a dead ball. With some skill, it should still be possible to make an all-round break, but the opponent has an opportunity to get involved in making it more difficult.

*Jonathan Kirby*

## GOLF CROQUET ORIGINS

The earliest writings about Croquet seem to have covered all possible formats, but Prichard covers only Association Croquet. Following the boom in GC since it went international, various people claim responsibility/credit for re-popularising this version of Croquet, most recently in my hearing Syd Jones, who said he found it in an old book. Nevertheless, the surviving minutes of Dulwich Croquet Club show clearly that it was played in the 1920s, probably best of 9 rather best of 13. I have never seen an early rule-book and possibly there were none?

Also does anybody know when it was first called Golf Croquet? There maybe a clue in the way that some of the 1940s minutes refer to "the greens", but nothing specific.

*Ray Hall*

*Dulwich@ashworth.demon.co.uk*

## A GOLF CROQUET ADVENTURE IN AUSTRALIA

My wife and I visit family in Australia for a couple of months most winters and thought we might take advantage of the delightful weather and play some croquet whilst there. This would also stand us in good stead on return to the UK where we would already be up to speed when the lawns open in April.

We found a club about an hour's drive away and contacted the Secretary to see if we could play Golf Croquet there. The response was most welcoming and we were invited to come along for 8.45 am on Thursday as they start and finish early to avoid the heat. We duly arrived at 8.45 to be met by the Secretary and introduced to some 12 players. An array of mallets was available for us to borrow, so, having chosen suitable ones we went to the most delightful Clubhouse and joined the rest who were waiting anxiously. A somewhat fearsome lady behind a large desk with a large bell on it welcomed us then read out at great speed names and lawns (so we were told, as it was a bit fast to follow) and everyone trooped out onto the four lawns. Two of the lawns had large bare patches on them and interesting contours. The other two had grass that in places could have been used to hide one's ball.

Having won the toss I was about to play when I was firmly told to wait for the bell. Shortly after, the fearsome lady came out and, with great vigour, rang the bell thus setting off all the kookaburras and, in a great cacophony of bird laughter, play began.

An interesting aspect to the play was the double banking. Both sets started simultaneously at diagonally opposite corners with the inevitable result that chaos descended at hoops five and six. After a short while we decided my game should set off for hoop seven – we would play five and six later. The other set decided they would go for our hoop eight just as we cleared seven so off to nine we went.

I played a very clever shot running the hoop leaving my opponent wired. She looked at the position for a short while then announced "Australian Rules" and lifted the hoop out of the ground, enabling her to play to right in front of the next hoop. I jumped her ball and ran the hoop. "What happened then" she asked in disbelief and I don't think she had seen a jump before.

We had finished a 13-point game but play went on so I assumed a 19-point game but play went on. Suddenly the BELL rang and everyone just walked straight off.

Back in the Clubhouse results were entered onto a large sheet by the fearsome lady, all drank copious amounts of water to hydrate themselves as the temperature was now approaching 30 degrees C, and the fearsome lady read out names and lawns again.

I waited in the long grass this time until the BELL rang. We only managed a 7-point game before the BELL this time, as a result of the long grass slowing the ball somewhat. All trooped into the Clubhouse, results were entered on the sheet, the men went off for beers and the fearsome lady looked forward to seeing us next week. Dare we not go!

*Bob Connop*

### ONLINE BANK OF PHOTOS

I'm a member of a small club, which has finally achieved some national success over the last two years, holding the Longman Cup and now the Townsend Trophy.

The first order of business any club has on achieving any success like this is, to notify the local press of this fact, in the hope they will carry the story, then update the club's website, which always does. This gave rise to the issue I would like to air.

The availability of decent photographs of the CA's Collection of silverware supported by their histories that could be used to add colour to any bulletin issued. Maybe suitable photos already exist, taken for insurance purposes perhaps. What I envisage is something similar to the player biographies that are held online for all to access and copy when we need to write and illustrate for the media. After all, yet another item in a newspaper might attract one more club member.

*Paul Rigge*

### REVIVING CROQUET AT WEST WORTHING

Croquet was part of the West Worthing Tennis Club when it opened in 1887 and was still being played there leading up to the Second World War and the last evidence we have of it is a silver sup being awarded to Major Jellicorse in 1933. The Club is now reviving its Croquet section after all these years and devoting three of its tennis lawns for two full-size croquet lawns.

Needless to say it has been a busy time for the four playing croquet members to get things organised. When would we open? Would we have an Open Day? What would the sub be? And so on. Oh, I nearly forgot: where would we get the hoops, balls and mallets from?! The CA, the South East Federation and the Sussex County Croquet Club at Southwick were fortunately there to help with the loan of equipment until we got going. We are very grateful to all three for this without which we could not have started.

We decided on 1st March as the start date and 26th March as an Open Day for anybody to come and try the game. The next thing was publicity to attract the hoards of potential croquet players in the region. The attractive CA posters and fliers suitably amended for the Club were then distributed to as many shop windows as possible (*vive le blue tac!*); quite a long article on croquet at the club giving all the details of membership found its way into the local community magazine and the West Sussex Gazette; local radio was contacted; and the Worthing Herald has agreed to send a photographer and reporter along for the Open Day at which Mayor of Worthing and the Youth Mayor will cut the ribbon/tee off. We are just about to take delivery of an 8 x 2ft banner with pretty pictures announcing CROQUET – A GAME FOR ALL AGES and FREE TRIALS WED AND FRI AFTERNOONS. I wasn't sure of the second phrase suggestive of the Inquisition but I'm a democrat and didn't argue!

The facilities at the tennis club are first class and croquet members are equal social members for their inclusive sub of £85. This is a very good deal which we hope will appeal. When our numbers grow as we hope, we shall start thinking of games with other clubs. In the meantime do come down and give us your advice on how to play! You will be very welcome. Here's hooping!

*Frank Lee*

### THE ALL NEW BARNSTAPLE CROQUET CLUB AT RALEIGH MEADOWS

We were members of a small club, restricted by the size of the courts (two courts each less than a third the size of a full sized court) but, WE HAD A DREAM, and dreams only come true if you work at it, so now we are working.

Encouraged by a local councillor we went to see a piece of land leased by the council to the town cricket club, surplus to requirements and NOT part of the outfield. We are now delighted to hold a long lease on enough space not just for one full sized court but for four and we are reliably informed that there isn't a club of that size (or in fact any club with full sized courts) for about fifty miles.

That's the first step accomplished and currently it is just a field but it is flat and that has got to be an advantage. With help and advice from the Croquet Association and the South West Federation we are just realizing how much we have taken on, but 2011 is going to be our first year and we have 17 keen members and a field, so a good start. We are organising fundraising events and applying to agencies that may help us with grants and we need to let the good folk of Barnstaple know who we are, where we are and what a great sport croquet is. We particularly want to encourage young players to join the club and with a cache of young men at the cricket club next door we might just make a start there.

We desperately need equipment but in particular a mower (you can't do anything with a mallet in long grass). In the long term we hope to buy a new mower, but if any club is replacing their mower, please give a thought to letting us have the old one. We would happily pay a sensible second hand price and could collect, though no one is going up to Scotland in the near future. Anyone out there who can help with advice, experience, tips or anything really, we would love to hear from you. Meanwhile watch out for Barnstaple Croquet Club: we are on our way to great things!

*Irene Fane,  
Secretary  
irenefane@  
yahoo.co.uk*

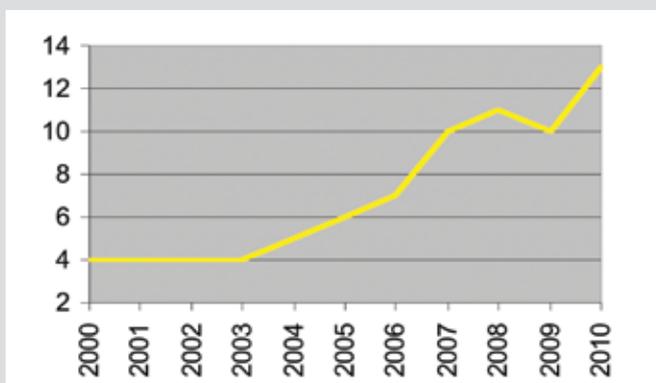


SYD JONES IN PLAY ON THE LONG GRASS AT BARNSTAPLE

# News & Information

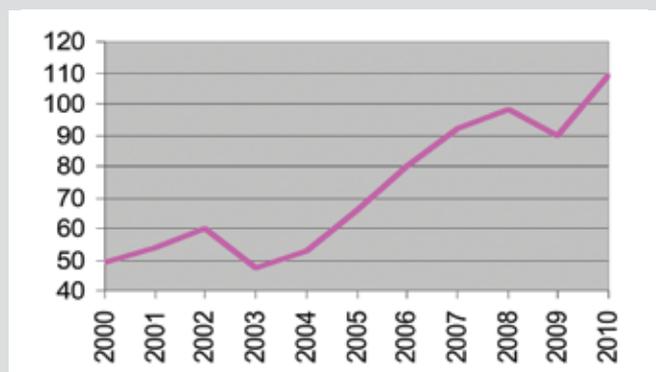
## 2010 GOLF CROQUET SEASON – THE NEW GUARD TAKES OVER

There has been plenty of debate recently about the state of croquet and whether the rapid growth of 'social' members of clubs, most of whom only play Golf Croquet, could cause long term damage to the sport. However, at the upper end of the Golf Croquet scene there is strong evidence of growing popularity and improving standards. In 2010 there was a record level of activity, continuing a well established trend of growth. This can be seen first of all in the strong growth in qualification tournaments for the Ascot Cup over the last 10 years (the CA Office has found similar results for all the Golf Croquet tournaments in the Fixtures Book):



NUMBER OF TOURNAMENTS

Not surprisingly this has been accompanied by a big increase in the number of players participating in these tournaments (this is the number of different players rather than the total number of entries, which has shown a similar trend of increase):



NUMBER OF INDIVIDUAL PLAYERS

Not only have numbers been rising but there has also been a very welcome influx of young players. In 2010 no less than seven of the top tournaments were won by under 25 year olds and the season ended with James Goodbun's impressive triumph at the Ascot Cup in the final against Jacob Carr.

Other notable features of the season were three tournament victories for Ryan Cabble, a first major win for Roger Barnacle and a strong performance from veteran William Ormerod who must be a candidate for most improved player of the year! Simon Carlsson beat Stephen Mulliner in the final of the European Championship. Unusually there were no wins for Reg Bamford. The Inter Club was won for the first time by Ashby with strong performances from William Gee and Rachel Rowe.

Increased participation and competition invariably leads to higher standards. Anecdotally we have seen the likes of Khalid Younis, Reg Bamford and Stephen Mulliner being beaten in tournaments. Factually we can look at how the rankings have evolved over the last eight years. In 2002 there was only one English player with an Index higher than 2400. In 2006 that had increased to 2 and by 2010 it had further increased to 6. If we look at Grades (which are faster moving) the trend is even better: 1-4-11. The cynical might cite a similar trend in A Level marks but there is no evidence of grade inflation in the rankings. Players who have been active for several years and not in the 'rapid improver' phase have seen their grades stay level, or even decline slightly.

How does this bode for the World Championships to be held next year? Could we see an English champion for the first time? The rankings suggest that is still a long shot. In 2002 there were 6 English players in the top 20 internationally, the same as today. This apparent lack of progress partly reflects the much broader reach of the rankings now, with most results outside of Egypt being captured. However, it's also true that other nations have not been standing still, with strong contenders emerging in Sweden and New Zealand.

In conclusion I think there are grounds for confidence but none for complacency. Our target needs to be to establish a similar breadth of top level competition as is found in Egypt. Only then will we be confident of having a home grown world champion.

## GREAT BRITAIN NO MORE IN THE MACROBERTSON SHIELD

*Ian Lines, CA International Committee*

In future, the MacRobertson Shield will be contested by England rather than Great Britain. The issue of whether England or Great Britain should compete in the MacRobertson Shield has been under discussion for several years, but has now been resolved by a CA Council decision on 22 January. The principal reason for this change was to allow Scotland, Wales and Jersey to take part in the lower tiers of the World Team Championship (WTC), which is now run by the WCF. Both the Scottish CA and the Welsh CA have agreed to the change, with Jersey and the Isle of Man not having expressed strong opinions on the matter.

It was generally agreed that it would be unreasonable to allow a player from Wales, for example, to have a choice of playing for GB in the top tier of the WTC (i.e. the MacRobertson Shield), or to play for Wales in a lower tier. Similarly, all the other Governing Bodies for the Mac (i.e. Australia, New Zealand and USA) felt strongly that it would be unfair for them to have to play against a GB team drawn from several WCF countries if some of those countries were also taking part in lower tiers of the event (i.e. having ‘two bites at the cherry’ or ‘double-dipping’).

One of the options that was considered was to keep the Mac entirely separate from the WTC, so that GB could continue as before. However, it was generally agreed that it was far preferable to have the Mac as the top tier in a wider WTC run by the WCF. Otherwise we would end up with two world team championships, which would be unsatisfactory and unsustainable.

This issue was considered in great detail by the International Committee, who took account of a wide variety of views and concerns. Many people would have preferred to remain as GB because they simply felt British, or because of the significant Mac history and tradition, or because it might mean that top players from Scotland, Wales, Jersey, etc. could be disadvantaged in no longer being able to play in the top tier of the WTC. Others were also concerned that if the lower tiers of the WTC fail to become regular events, then there would have been no benefit in making any change.

In order to help its deliberations, the International Committee asked David Maugham to conduct a survey of English croquet players. The result was broadly in favour of a change from Great Britain to England, presumably because most players appreciated the pragmatic benefits for croquet generally in terms of allowing other parts of GB to take part in the lower tiers of the WTC.

One of the reasons for not taking a decision earlier was that it was unclear how successful the lower tier events would be. As it turned out, all the lower tiers of the WTC in 2010 were considered to be successful enough to expect that they will continue in some similar format in the future. This strengthened the argument for moving from GB to England, although the CA has reserved the right to revert to GB in the Mac if, for some reason, the lower tiers fail to take place as part of the wider WTC.



## WREST PARK TOURNAMENT DATES CHANGED DUE TO GARDEN WORKS

*John Bevington, Secretary, Wrest Park CC*

English Heritage is carrying out extensive works in the gardens starting in March and continuing until August. As a result no weekday daytime play will be possible during this period. The May and July Association tournaments will now be two-day events on 21-22 May and 2-3 July (entry fee £12.50), and the golf croquet tournament planned for Wednesday 22nd June will now take place on Saturday 25th June. Our apologies for any inconvenience this may cause. If shortening the AC tournaments to two days means that you are now in a position to enter we look forward to hearing from you, and we would also welcome entries for the rescheduled GC tournament.

## NOMINATIONS FOR ELECTION OR NOTICES OF MOTIONS FOR THE 2011 AGM

Any nominations for the posts of Hon. Treasurer, Hon. Secretary or membership of the 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 1st June. Nominations should give the name of the candidate together with those of the proposer and seconder, and the consent of the candidate should have been obtained.

It should be noted that there are some other events, which are not run by the WCF, such as the Solomon Trophy against the USA, and the Ian Maugham Salver against Ireland, where the teams will still be picked by the CA AC Selection Committee to represent GB, where GB means England, Scotland, Wales, Channel Islands and Isle of Man and noting that it has been agreed that Northern Ireland will no longer be a qualification for GB as it is part of the domain of the Irish CA. These international matches, together with the Home Internationals, provide excellent experience, and players are strongly encouraged to put their name forward for selection.

In conclusion, it has been decided that in 2014 it will be an England team competing in Christchurch New Zealand for the MacRobertson Shield, and I'm sure they will want to win every bit as much as the 2010 Great Britain team did, no matter what the name of the country on their shirts.

# Club News

CLUB FOCUS FEATURE

SPECTATORS ENJOYING PLAY AT THE SUMMER TOURNAMENT



*By Peter Death*

## NOTTINGHAM CROQUET CLUB

The club was founded in 1928, when Mrs Elliott reported to a meeting at the Windmill Café that she had received an offer of land large enough for 4 full-sized croquet lawns (later extended to 5), at an annual rental of £100. Mrs Elliott's daughter, Miss K M Elliott, remained a Vice-President of the club until her death in 2010 at the age of 104 (see Gazette 329).



DAVID BRYDON IN PLAY

The land, in University Park, was being given to the city by Sir Jesse Boot, later Lord Trent, founder of what is now Alliance Boots, an international pharmacy, health and beauty group, which began as a small herbalist shop in the centre of Nottingham.

The first tournament was held in 1930 and appears to have continued every year since – though during the war it was unofficial, with proceeds going to war charities. We have a fine collection of trophies, many of them donated in the early 1930s: perhaps the most important is the Robin Hood Gold Cup, donated by the Croquet Association in 1950. From the 1970s onwards, weekend tournaments gained in popularity, and the club now holds six of them each year, some played on handicap, others to advanced rules. For some tournaments we have the use of two of the adjacent bowling greens, courtesy of the City Council.

By the mid 1960s the club, in common with others across the country, was at a low ebb. Its revival can be said to have started with the recruitment of six boys from Nottingham High School in 1966. Two of those are still members, and

one of them, Gordon Hopewell, is now a Vice-President of the club, having retired from the Presidency after a lengthy stint. The current President, Peter Death, joined in 1975, the year after the 1974 MacRobertson test match which itself attracted a further influx of members. Ian Vincent, now the Honorary Secretary of the Croquet Association, joined the club in 1976, and has been club Secretary since 1978.

We have hosted the Mac Robertson Shield on 3 occasions, and feature regularly as a venue for the Invitation events: the President's Cup is due to be held at Nottingham in 2011. If you want to see the top players in action, playing the new Super Advanced rules, come to Nottingham in September.

The club has a number of strong players, among them Keith Aiton, the Great Britain captain, Paddy Chapman, the New Zealand international who joined us in 2010, and James Death, the 2010 Men's champion. The club has competed with some success in the AC Inter-Club and Mary Rose competitions, winning the former in 2010, and club members form the core of the Nottinghamshire county team which won the Inter-Countries Championship for 3 consecutive years in 2005 – 2007 and again in 2009, before finishing second to Somerset in 2010.

But the club is not just the top players. We have members of all levels of ability, and an active coaching programme to introduce new players to the game and to improve the skills of those who have been playing for a while. In the autumn of 2010 we were able, with the co-operation of our landlords, to introduce 'out of season' play on the bowling greens. This was well supported until the Arctic conditions of late November and December put an end to outdoor activity. The other winter activities, the fortnightly bridge competition and the Annual Dinner, continued throughout.

The Club's traditional strength has been in the Association game, but in recent years increasing interest in Golf Croquet has led to a welcome growth of membership, which is now higher than it has ever been, as far as we know. New members are always welcome.

# MILTON KEYNES STONY STRATFORD CROQUET CLUB

*By Roy Healey*

Over the past few years a few of our members have had an informal get-together on New Year's Day for a game of croquet to welcome in the New Year, so this year we decided to formalise it and make it a Club event.

We had an excellent turn-out of nineteen members who enjoyed several hours of golf croquet, interspersed with hot soup and rolls, as well as copious amounts of hot tea and coffee. We were very lucky with the weather as in both the weeks before and after New Year we had several inches of snow and our festivities would have been spoilt.

As you will see from the photographs everyone was well wrapped up to keep out the cold, with scarves, woolly hats and gloves the order of the day. Our modest but homely Clubhouse became a cosy haven from the winter weather and the refreshments were most welcome. Most of our members are in the "qualifying for a bus pass" age group so it was a splendid effort by the members when they could easily have stayed at home in their armchairs in front of the fire.

We have an excellent spirit in the Club and don't take ourselves too seriously, playing mostly golf croquet for fun but we have surprised ourselves by getting to the final of the East Anglian Golf Croquet League Competition for the past two years. In both cases we met Enfield in the final, losing narrowly in 2009 but managing to reverse the result in 2010, so we are looking forward to see what 2011 brings. Whatever it is, we definitely got off to a great start with our New Year's Day Meeting.



MANDY BALLANTINE, RAMSGATE'S YOUNGEST MEMBER BEING TUTORED BY DENNIS SHAW, RAMSGATE'S OLDEST MEMBER

## IN PRAISE OF RAMSGATE'S JUNIORS

*By Zoe Hawkins*

Ramsgate's Saturday morning club for Juniors was begun by Roy Ware and Mary Currie. Their enthusiastic dedication over a number of years meant that last year the Club hit the croquet news headlines twice in spectacular fashion.

Tobi Savage, in 2010, [who as a junior always went for the largest biscuit during the mid-morning break] jump-shotted his way to the finals of the All England Golf Handicap Tournament, and won. James Goodbun, now at college, was invited to play in the Ascot Club and because he excelled himself by winning the event has been invited to represent Great Britain in the World Golf Croquet Championships being held at Hurlingham/Surbiton this July 2011.

Mary and Roy have moved to Lincolnshire but Roy has already entered the Ramsgate Open Golf Weekend Tournament held in June this year and I'm sure he'll be delighted to see, and dare I say it, even lose to his old pupils. The photo shows Ramsgate's youngest member Mandy Ballantine being tutored by Ramsgate's oldest member Dennis Shaw. Mandy was only permitted to join the Saturday Morning Club at the age of eight because we already coached her elder brother Fynn.

I do urge other clubs not to get too upset when their young members become teenagers and suddenly leave the club. Other interests and exams have a habit of taking over their lives. It's truly wonderful when some of them eventually return to the club as adults with a fresh enthusiasm for the game.



SUSAN ELLIS PLAYING A SHOT BEING CLOSELY OBSERVED BY PETER DALE AND MARIAN HOLLAND

# Club News

## FYLDE CROQUET CLUB FACILITIES – NOT ALL GAINED THROUGH THE USUAL MEANS

By Liz Wilson

Fylde is a small club with 20 playing members and is based at Blackpool South Shore Tennis Club. The move was made at the end of 2005 from a Council run ground where we were getting increasing problems mainly in the form of unpleasantness and vandalism from the local youth. It was no longer a pleasure to be there. In our first year at South Shore Lawn Tennis Club, with the help of a grant from Sports For All, we bought a 14 ft by 12 ft shed to act as a club house. We were also sold at greatly reduced cost a “safe equipment store”. We were offered the use of 3 disused and completely neglected, overgrown tennis courts and over the winter members removed concrete bases from the net supports and from the surrounding corroded fence supports. We removed fallen *Leylandii* which had fallen on to and rooted into the lawns and then re-seeded the areas. Despite the rough and undulating lawns we were very happy in our new location. The problems started with the summer monsoon rains of 2007. The whole area flooded quickly and drained slowly. Local seagulls spent more time swimming on it than we spent playing. How many of you remember the synchronised croquet video on YouTube?! Talking to local residents, it was evident that there was good drainage put in originally but that the drains had clearly become blocked due to a whole row of fallen *Leylandii* at the far end of the site. Over the next winter we dug a new trench and broke into the land drains, diverting the water to a pre existing drainage ditch. Problem solved. Let the croquet begin in earnest.

The Grounds Team at FCC have always been scavengers. We have used old metal roofing sheets to shore up the sides of the trench and to rebuild the roof of an equipment store, which “took off in the wind”. We have begged wood from building site hoardings for ball stops. We have had generous donations and reduced cost items from the local garden centre. Members “throw” unused fridges, chairs, tables, crockery, etc our way. We have made a sun shelter from discarded tennis net posts and scrap wood.

In 2009 we took on two more disused grass courts which are developing nicely to give us three lawns. Our best scavenging to date came in the form of a delightful summerhouse (8 ft x 6 ft) which we have erected on the new lawns. One of our members was looking for a new house and he visited a house which he didn't want to buy, but fancied the summerhouse in



LAWNS IN 2007



CANOPY IN DEVELOPMENT



CANOPY IN USE

the very small back garden. He left a letter asking the future buyer if FCC could have it if she didn't want it. Miracle – Alexandra donated it to us! We now have our own version of the Alexandra Palace on lawn 3. Amusingly, there is a slide show published on YouTube called Alexandra Palace, which has had many over 2000 hits – probably all very disappointed tourists! In November 2010 we managed to buy a “new” club house on eBay – a 16 ft by 8 ft shed. We moved our existing shed to a new location and erected the new acquisition. This inspired us to greater things! How about kitchen units at one end? No problem: ask around for someone throwing an old one out and fit it. We could do with power-unfortunately as we had no qualified electrician on board, we had to buy in, which we have done with the help of the CA. We could do with an outside shelter for visiting players-the equivalent of Bowdon's veranda. We had run out of materials and this structure needed to be very strong to cope with the “sea breezes”. We received many professional quotes ranging from £1,400 (without a site visit) to £3,500. This was clearly out of our league and so again we requested help from the CA and they thankfully obliged. The CA offered to fund half the cost of the electricity and the canopy up to a maximum of £1,000. We immediately got the electricity installed and the Grounds Team decided to “Go for it” and build the substantial structure themselves. The resulting canopy is a delight and we are sure will be standing long after even the youngest of our members is gone.

Fylde is now in a position to accommodate many more players and has already agreed to host the North West Federation Short Lawn Tournament—with a maximum entry of 24. We have also been granted the opportunity to host the CA vs CAI event in July—well we are only two minutes from Blackpool Airport!

### A NEW AID TO RECRUITMENT

The CA's Marketing Committee have designed a presentation for use by clubs and Federations when trying to enthruse groups of people to take up croquet. The DVD entitled “Have you tried croquet?” is available free to clubs and Federation Officers by applying to Liz Larsson at the CA office. It would make an ideal part of a presentation to such groups as Probus, Rotary, U3A and many others. To use it, you will need a computer and screen suitable for presentation to your target audience. Many thanks go to Tony Thomas, Robert Edlin-White and Samir Patel for their help in putting this progressive presentation together. *Marketing Committee March 2011*

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For details or discussion, contact Alan Pidcock,  
Tel & Fax **01772 743859** e-mail [pidcock@manorh.plus.com](mailto:pidcock@manorh.plus.com)  
The Manor House, 1 Barn Croft, Penwortham, Preston PR1 0SX

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# MALLETS AND MAINTENANCE

*By Prof Alan Pidcock*

The individual mallet makers who advertise their wares in the Gazette (Barrett, Hobbs, Percival and Pidcock – B,H, Pv and Pk) have not yet formed a Guild, but they do co-operate in several ways, including the production of this article at the request of an Editor urgently needing copy. Three of us (H, Pv and Pk) are known to grieve silently when we see the state of maintenance of some of our mallets. Indeed, tears (of the crocodile variety) are sometimes shed—usually on the way to the bank—so this article aims to spare us a little by offering brief but reasonably comprehensive advice to those prepared to spend a little time on mallet upkeep.

Wooden headed mallets (H, Pv, Pk, George Wood from the CA Shop) are popular because they are relatively inexpensive, aesthetically pleasing and the use of wood allows extra weight to be placed optimally just behind the faces to provide more resistance to twisting (“peripheral weighting”) than a head of uniform density. The timbers used are normally heavy and fine-grained and they are intrinsically prone to develop fine cracks in warm dry conditions. Such cracks have no noticeable effect on performance, but it is a good idea to seal them by treating with a drop of Superglue (cyanoacrylate) to prevent water penetration. Mallet storage in an unheated outbuilding is desirable and central heating is a great enemy. If wet, clean and dry before putting away.

Although wooden handles use less sensitive timbers, they may warp, so traditional storage has the handle hanging below a supported head, so that air is free to circulate all round the unstressed shaft.

Players’ backbones are more valuable than their mallets, so the position of balls is often adjusted in play without bending down by ‘trundling’ them with the side of the mallet head. However, rotation of a gritty ball in trundling is a rather effective way of grinding away the protective coating on the mallet head and eventually some of the wood of the head will disappear too. Mallet faces, on the other hand, will stand up to such abrasion relatively well and, as it requires a little more skill, trundling with the mallet face is both preferable and enjoyable. Otherwise, penetration by water through the damaged sides may cause further deterioration of the head and it can be alleviated only by relatively frequent re-sealing. This is very easy when the head has been oiled (Pv, Pk – a rag moistened with Danish Oil) and will be required less frequently, but with a little more effort if lacquered (George Wood; H – Rustin’s Plastic Coating). These materials are available in conveniently small quantities and can be located through Yellow Pages, for example, under ‘Timber Merchants’. Wax polishing is also beneficial, but if all methods are failing, consider trundling with your shoe instead.

Trundling will take the shine off and abrade even hard carbon-fibre based heads (P; restore with metal polish), but black solid polymer heads (B) are nearly impervious and respond well to black shoe polish. Mallet faces (including brass) can be cleaned up with steel wool – most easily with the addition of a drop of solvent such as cellulose thinners.

Makers (or the CA Shop for George Wood) stock and supply replacement face plates. A change of striking sound to a “clack” is a strong indication that a composite face is beginning to part from the back face. Tapping over the face with a one pound coin is a useful test and will normally locate the problem area. A drop or two of Superglue applied to the hairline crack between the faces in that region while simultaneously tapping the face will then expel small air bubbles and longitudinal clamping or pressure on the face for an hour or so usually makes a ‘permanent’ repair. If the face comes right off, it can be replaced after thoroughly cleaning and abrading both surfaces. Use a slow setting epoxy glue (such as Araldite 2011) on both joining surfaces) and clamp up with moderate pressure for 24h at room temperature. Small clamps set across the face are useful in keeping it accurately located, and masking tape around the back face usefully eases clean up of surplus glue after it has set (eg. start with a sharp chisel).

If faces are lost or damaged, the originator of the mallet will generally supply oversized replacements: gluing is straightforward (as above), but the removal of the overhang requires tools (in order of decreasing speed and convenience): router with guided trimming cutter, sharp block plane, ceramic tile file, abrasive wrapped round a block; an angle grinder would require great care). A cautious approach is required to avoid scratching the rest of the mallet head and masking tape round the back face to collect some of the excess glue is useful too in giving early warning of potential scratching.

Handles present few problems, though grips, which nowadays are intended to be disposable, are often well past optimal performance before they are replaced. Wound grips are available in variety from sports shops and are stocked by some makers (H, Pv and CA Shop). Foam covered handles can be freshened up by a single pass with fine abrasive (eg. 240 grit) and when worn can be replaced entirely (maker) or covered with a wound grip, of which various thicknesses are widely available (including very thin ‘overgrip’). When winding on a grip, adjust the diagonal tapering cut so that its length matches the circumference of the handle. This gives an accurate start to the required winding pitch.

Finally, in the event of disaster, makers will be glad to supply and fit (if necessary) replacement handles and heads (—or both!).

# New Tournament Regulations for Refereeing

By Ian Vincent

The tournament regulations for refereeing, for both Association and Golf Croquet, are being replaced this season. They are the regulations with numbers prefixed by the letter R in <http://www.croquet.org.uk/?p=tournament/regulations.html> and the old ones were printed in the back of the AC Laws Book. The replacement is a set of regulations agreed by the International Laws Committee, with the addition of alternative text in square brackets to make them applicable to Golf as well as Association Croquet in the relatively few areas where they need to differ. Note that they do not affect the arrangements for training and examining referees—only how they officiate. Although the new regulations look rather different at first sight, the main changes are of presentation and terminology, rather than their effect in practice. One of the major problems that the committee faced in trying to harmonise the regulations in use in different countries were that the same words were used with different meanings in different countries. Thus, for instance, refereeing qualification, whereas in New Zealand an Umpire had the equivalent of our Assistant Referee qualification, and was thus able to adjudicate faults. Practice also varies between countries: for instance, some parts of Australia have a tradition of more active refereeing than we have.

The first regulation defines two types of referee authorised to officiate in a tournament. The first, a “Referee on Request” is the type of referee we are familiar with, i.e. someone who normally only responds when a mallet is raised and otherwise has only very limited powers to act on his own volition. The other, a “Supervising Referee”, is someone who is appointed to look after one or more games and can intervene if errors occur that are unnoticed by the players. A Referee on Request is said to become “Active” when he is invoked by the players, and then has full powers; Supervising Referees are always active. It is not expected that Supervising Referees will be appointed for tournaments in this country, with the possible exception of beginners’ events, unless relations between the players have broken down.

The second regulation describes the powers and duties of an active referee, and gives him the same power to forestall the striker as the adversary has if he suspects an error or interference is about to occur. The power is also subject to the same restrictions, such as not forestalling if a fatal error is about to be made or a wrong hoop run. There is also a power to require the striker to replay a stroke if it was played before the referee was ready. This regulation also gives the power to investigate incidents that have already happened, by interrogating the players and optionally other witnesses. There is no explicit mention of different grades of referees (e.g.

Assistant or Championship Referees), but there is a provision for a referee to seek advice from or refer a decision to a more qualified one if necessary.

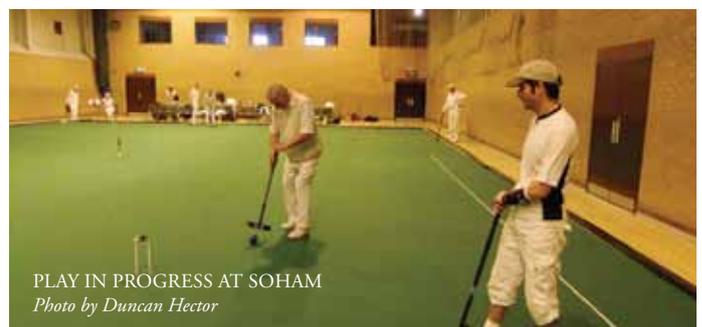
R3 gives the very limited circumstances in which an inactive referee can intervene on his own initiative and is the equivalent of the powers of a spectator referee under the old regulations.

R4 spells out, much more explicitly than in the old regulations, whether a referee requested to act can use information gained from previously watching the game. The principle is that he should try to act in the same way as someone who has not been watching the game, unless one of the players raises an issue to which the information is relevant. An example is that of a referee watching a game who notices that the striker has played the wrong ball and is then called upon to judge how far it got through the hoop he was attempting. The referee should just rule on that, and keep quiet about the wrong ball error, unless: a player queries which ball the striker should have been playing; or the positioning of the clips would raise suspicions in the mind of someone who had not been watching the game.

R5 deals with the Tournament Referee and R6 with appeals. The “limit of claims” for making an appeal has been extended to give the outplayer a bit more time, particularly if (s)he has been called away to manage, referee or check on the potatoes! However, the principle remains that you can’t appeal once you have played a further stroke.

R7 covers what we used to call Umpires, i.e. the powers given to unqualified players to watch what happens in strokes where faults are unlikely to occur, though these are now restricted to players who have played in at least three previous tournaments (to ensure that they have at least some level of experience).

Finally R8 reminds all players of a game of their duty to draw attention to something they think a referee may have overlooked, even if it is to their disadvantage to do so.



PLAY IN PROGRESS AT SOHAM  
Photo by Duncan Hector

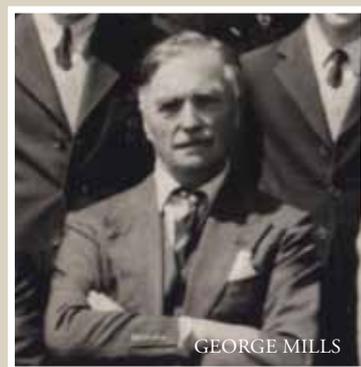


By Sam Williams

# Who is George Mills?

## An unlikely search with surprising results for a 5th grade teacher in the USA

As a middle-aged American whose most memorable accomplishment in a game of croquet was having a tooth knocked out once by my mallet wielding five-year-old brother, writing about croquet in the UK was something I certainly never foresaw. How the post-WWII era of croquet in England came to be of such great interest to a staunch baseball fan in the United States certainly has been surprising!



The link to my interest in the game came from an unlikely source: George Ramsay Acland Mills, originally of Bude, Cornwall, and his spinster sisters, Agnes and Violet.

As an inveterate watcher of *Masterpiece Theatre* and many so-called Britcoms here in the States, I am continually fetching my laptop to ascertain just what “Sainsbury’s” would be, or where exactly Surbiton is. One evening I heard a cricket reference to “King Willow,” and discovered—probably mistakenly in regard to that particular television program—that there was a little-known children’s book of that title, written by a man named George Mills.

As a 5th grade teacher, I wondered about that book for and about schoolchildren. I also tried to discover more about this George Mills. Google, however, produced 7,220,000 hits for George Mills and 6,750,000 for King Willow. Needles and haystacks immediately came to mind, but never having been one to put down a good puzzle, I blundered ahead. Discovering that author Stanley Elkin wrote a book entitled *George Mills*, having selected that name for the epic magnitude of its anonymity, I thought, “Excellent choice!” Who, I continued to wonder, is George Mills?

To answer that question I’ve worked via a website/blog called “*Who Is George Mills?*” for the past year. The edition of *King Willow* I located likely had been published in the 1950s, but

even that was uncertain as it contained no copyright date. Within a month, though, I’d discovered it was a reprint of the 1938 first edition, which was the sequel to George’s well-received 1933 book *Meredith and Co.*

And it was then I realized that I should have called the website “*Who Was George Mills?*”—George likely was no longer with us.

Mills presented me with a delicious mystery that I simply had to solve: He had published a well-regarded novel in 1933, then published two more novels and a religious text on St. Thomas of Canterbury all during 1938-1939—then never published anything more than a pair of letters to *The Times* before his passing at Grey Friars in Budleigh Salterton in 1972. I wanted very much to determine why.

The exact reason for George’s early exit from the impressive roster of British authors still eludes me. His books have been noted for perfectly capturing and preserving the idiom of prep school boys during the period between the wars, something that was then unprecedented. But at the onset of the Second World War, Mills rejoined the British Army as a paymaster and was never heard from as an author again.

In trolling the internet for George, I happened upon numerous references in *The Times* to his sisters, Agnes and Violet. In fact, there were more than I ever would have expected! These were

found in over two decades of tournament croquet results and prize lists from all over England.

Those results have not told me a great deal about George himself, but they have opened my eyes to a simply amazing cast of characters from what American journalist Tom Brokaw described as “The Greatest Generation.”

On the lawns with George and his sisters strode giants in numerous walks of life: Olympic skier and 1961 CA Women’s Championship winner **Isobel Roe**; World class women’s hockey great and author **Joan Warwick**, four-time winner of the Women’s Championship; Anglo-Catholic Christian Socialist, philosopher, philanthropist, and longtime CA president **Maurice B. Reckitt**; His wife, **Aimee Reckitt**, a women’s tennis player who played at Wimbledon and the Epsom Finals; Chaplain to George VI and Elizabeth II, New Zealand’s first badminton champion, and croquet stalwart, the **Ven. Ralph Creed Meredith**; Sussex entrepreneur and veteran of both World Wars, **John Roland Abbey**, whose collection of antiquarian volumes and illuminated manuscripts was the envy of libraries, museums, and collectors across the world; his wife, **Lady Ursula Abbey**, breeder and exhibitor of world class show dogs and a renowned shooter and general out-doors woman; **Henry Hugh Gordon “Dacre” Stoker**, a naval hero at Gallipoli, star of stage and screen (some two dozen films), and cousin of Dracula’s Bram Stoker; **Sir Leonard Daldry**, an executive banker and senator in the Nigerian legislature, who spent most of his career in the African nation and oversaw Nigerian independence in 1960; and **Dr. William P. Ormerod**, one of the all-time greats in British croquet, still ranked and competing in a career that includes membership on multiple MacRobertson Shield-winning teams for Great Britain as well a President’s Cup Championship in 1962.

That is by no means a comprehensive list, and I am still researching many other players from that era of croquet. Would that I could have been a proverbial fly on the walls of that period’s clubs, as these greats spoke of their games, their travels, their careers, their experiences, and how they felt about the world as it changed so dramatically from the late 19th into the latter part of the 20th century!

The post-war croquet careers of George, Agnes, and Violet Mills encompassed the years 1947–1971 and included 32 official first place prizes, including the Luard and Gilbey Cups and the Evans Trophy. The Mills siblings travelled from Exmouth to Buxton to The Saffrons, playing the sport they loved with dear friends all around England.

George, a veteran of both World Wars, a schoolmaster, and an author, played his first tournament game in 1957 at the age of 61. His obituary from the April 1973 issue of the *Croquet Gazette*, written by Lt. Col. Gerald E. Cage of Budleigh,



AGNES MILLS AND BARBARA CHITTENDEN

includes the line: “George Mills was a late starter to croquet, but his exuberant and loveable personality made him a welcome member of the game.”

Although I have had a great deal of help from many kind folks around the internet, I may never really have the answer to my question, “Who Is George Mills?” George and his sisters all passed away childless. There are no sons, daughters, nephews, nieces, or grandchildren to remember George—or any of them. The Mills, despite George’s now out-of-print books, have been largely forgotten.



Short of finding someone who knew the Mills siblings well, the best way for me to “get to know” George and his sisters has been by entering their world vicariously and trying to see things they must have seen, visit the places they went, and meet some of the people the Mills surely met. It has been a trip through time and, living here in Florida, across an ocean.

The croquet clubs of the era provided George Mills with fertile ground for conversation, for reminiscences, for sharing interesting experiences and rekindling memories, and for putting his own life and his nation’s recent history into perspective. It was done with family and friends on lawns across England. I wish I had been there.

I truly wish I had known George Mills.

*Lastly, anyone wishing to know more about Sam’s sleuthing can look at my website [www.whoisgeorgemills.com](http://www.whoisgeorgemills.com), although accessing items specifically dealing with croquet is easier when using the address: <http://www.whoisgeorgemills.com/search/label/croquet>.*

# Tips for Coaches 4

By David Mooney

## Overload Training (basics)

When coaching players at higher levels than basic teaching, it is often difficult to spot potential problems in technique, tactics and psychological approach. The player may be able to demonstrate good understanding in the coaching situation but be unable to carry that level of play/knowledge into their general play or competitive play. The coach needs feedback to be able to address these problems. Often the player is unaware of the problem themselves so cannot articulate the problem to the coach.

Overload training is a coaching technique that applies pressure to a technique or skill so that inherent faults are exposed. Basic overloading techniques include:

- Random testing/revision within a coaching environment.
- Extending difficulty level within a coaching Environment by use of special practice regimes.
- Getting the player to enter competitions at a level not undertaken before or expanding the player's playing sphere within the club.

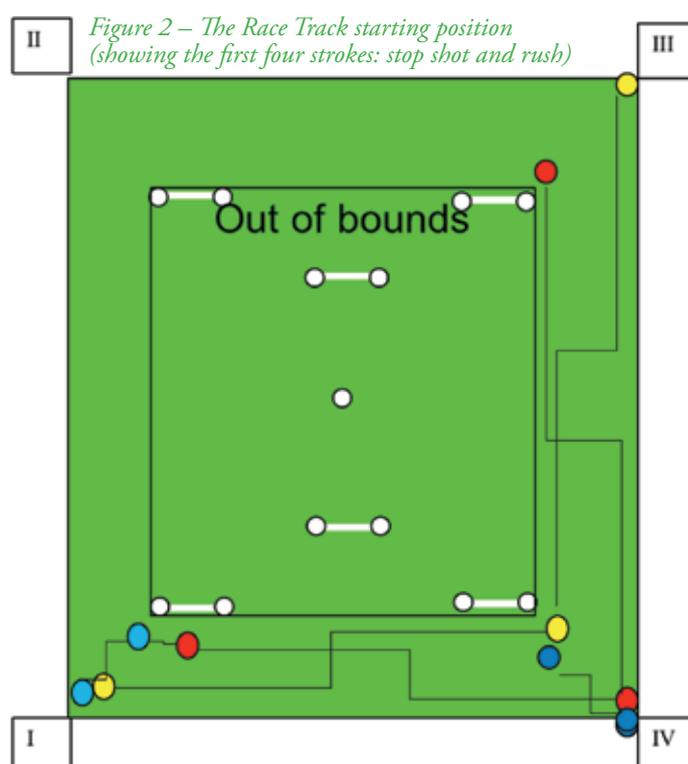
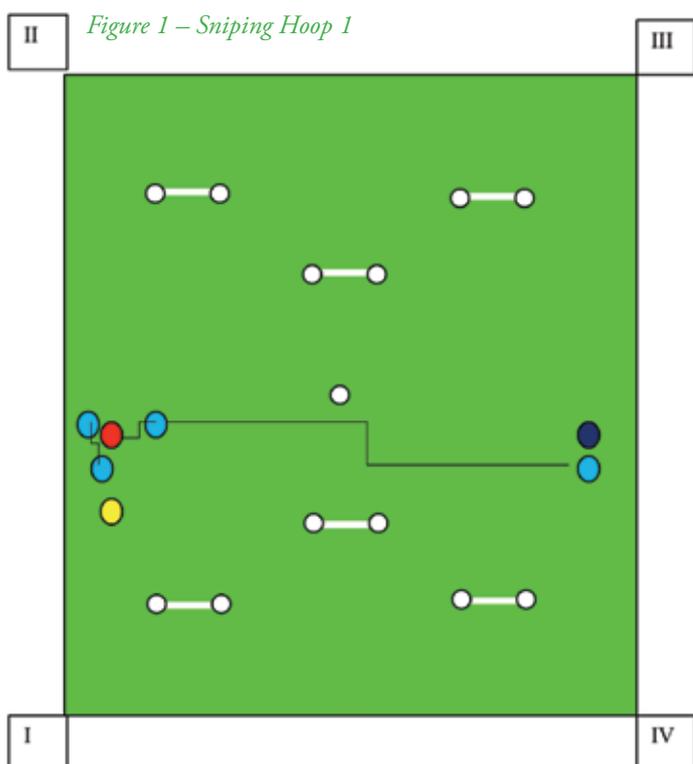
### Random Testing/Revision

If you are in the process of carrying out a course at any level over a number of weeks, it is worth taking one of the topics from the previous lesson and carrying out a revision exercise. If possible, it is better to use a practice situation

that you didn't use the previous week in coaching/teaching the skill. (It is important not to teach the skill again at this point). Hiding the skill within a playing situation is also useful. If you have a mixed ability group, then a small alteration in the practice regime can provide a higher difficulty level, thus accommodating the differing ability levels.

### Example: Straight Rushing

The class was taught how to rush a ball across the lawn and practised rushing balls across the lawn from the south boundary (see Tips for Coaches 3). This week, the class is shown the following exercise of Sniping Hoop 1. The player has just hit in across the lawn on his partner ball (black), which is peg high on the east boundary. Opponent balls are joined up mid-way up the west boundary. The pupil must undertake an accurate thin take off across the lawn to the opposition balls, roquet one of them and take off to his dolly rush distance behind the other ball so that he can straight rush the ball to Hoop 1, approach the hoop and make the hoop (see Figure 1). The exercise uses only the simplest croquet stroke, the take off, and a short straight rush, so is ideal for improvers who have just learnt to rush. This exercise can be used as an overload practice for C and B class players to practise their rushing out of hoops by using a No Pioneer Break. In such a no pioneer break two balls always remain on the east and west boundaries, peg high. After making a



hoop you must always get a rush to the ball on the boundary nearest to the hoop you are about to run. You must then take off behind the boundary ball and get a rush to the next hoop, hence repeating the Sniping Hoop sequence of shots. This puts the player's straight rushing technique under additional pressure and I would expect a handicap 6-9 to maybe manage a 3 hoop break, 3-5 to manage up to 6 hoops and 3 and below a 12 hoop break some of the time. It should be noted that this is a useful technique against players with a lot of bisques, when developing the balls into a normal break position may prove to be too dangerous if the break is put down.

The second exercise is really for handicaps 5 and below but could be used with any single handicap player who is beginning to get reasonable success with 3 ball breaks: it is called the Race Track. It is for overloading rushing and playing a stop shot or drive

with the forward ball going to a set position and the striker's ball getting behind a third ball with the intention of rushing that ball to a specific position. The Race Track is played with 3 balls and only utilises the area between the boundaries and hoops 1-4. No hoops are run and the in-field area is Out of Bounds to any ball. You start in contact in corner 1, with the third ball a yard south of hoop 1 (*see Figure 2*). Then proceed anticlockwise in the same manner around the court. If you have control you should be able to approach the physical minimum number of 12 stokes. This skill is key to all the higher skills of the 3 ball break, digging breaks out without bisques and especially multiple peeling such as the delayed triple and the sextuple where you are required to rush your pioneer to the next hoop. The point of the exercise is to highlight how much space is required to be able to place a ball to a forward position and getting behind a ball to rush accurately to a point.

## Golf Croquet Coaching

### Taking Position in Tournament Golf Croquet

By Robert Fulford

Golf croquet has been accused of lacking tactical depth and subtlety. This article was written in response to that accusation, looking at one aspect of golf croquet tactics.

There is an awful lot of subtlety just in taking position, particularly when you are good enough at hoop running that you pose a good threat to run the hoop without being very close and straight. For example, in the first stroke of the game, where do you as blue aim to take position? Two feet perfectly straight in front of hoop 1 would be a nice spot to land. Alternatively you can take position further back, to give yourself more room for error, but then you are reducing your chance of running 1 nicely up to hoop 2 and perhaps reducing your chance of being able to jaws or make a good block right in front of the hoop. It is clearly much better to go past the straight in front position than finish short. If blue goes past runnable position it is still in a reasonable position to clear red a long way if red takes close position, whereas a shorter blue can only clear towards the near side boundary. Similarly, if blue fails to get good position it is generally better to be more towards the south boundary and in a position to clear red north if it tries to take close position. The answer is going to depend on the particular skills of you and your opponent and the playing conditions. Typically, I tend to aim for about 8 feet back and a foot past straight position.

The above is one of the most simple cases and obviously familiar. In this case the opponent is unlikely to hit you, and if they do, both balls will most likely finish on the east boundary and it isn't a disaster. In the middle of a game it is much more complex, because the opponent's balls can both be in places where they can take your ball out more easily. If

you are lucky enough that you don't have to worry about the opponent running the hoop in his next couple of shots, there is still plenty to think about, rather than just taking good position. In particular:

- 1) Can the opponent hit me away and maintain position for the hoop?
- 2) Can the opponent hit me away and stay near the hoop?
- 3) How far can the opponent hit me away?
- 4) Can I use wiring?

For 1) stopshots tend not to stop dead, and by placing your ball at an angle to the hoop it often means the opponent can't hit you and hold position.

For 1) and 2) you can make a big difference to how accurate and effective an opponent's stopshot is likely to be, by placing your ball maybe just an extra half yard away. Against the best players, you also need to think about cut clearances where they can scatter you across the court, but only go off a near boundary themselves (particularly attractive if they can get straight in front of hoops 1, 3, 7, 9 or 13).

For 3) think about where a clearance can send you. If the opponent can only hit you to a near side boundary, it is much less of a problem than if they can hit you 30 yards away.

As always, you need to think about the likely degree of error in your shot. Failing to take position at all is often an awful result and similarly, failing to get a wired position can leave a very easy clearance. Not taking position at all and just trying to be close to the hoop such that the opponent has difficulty taking you out can sometimes be a good play. It becomes extremely difficult to make the right decision. Imagine the above and now throw in that the opponent has a hoop shot with a 15% probability of success that maybe you should worry about, and then you have blocking or trying to take that ball out as options as well. I constantly find myself thinking I should have aimed to do something different. Golf croquet is a far from simple game!

The Lawn Company have a wealth of experience turning around the fortunes of croquet lawns whether they are managed professionally for a club or privately owned by keen croquet players in the garden at home.

The company's portal web site [www.lawn.co.uk](http://www.lawn.co.uk) is split into -

Advice – [www.grassclippings.co.uk](http://www.grassclippings.co.uk)

Service – [www.lawntreatment.co.uk](http://www.lawntreatment.co.uk)

Supply – [www.thelawnshop.co.uk](http://www.thelawnshop.co.uk)

Their principle and Managing Director, Mike Seaton who has over 30 years of practical, technical and commercial turf culture experience under his belt has a pragmatic approach to assisting clubs with their lawns. One key aspect is clear, concise and timely advice which may form part of a Lawn Consultancy visit and supporting short formal report.

Mike and his Team are very capable of managing autumn renovations themselves and also working with club members to perform the lawn maintenance tasks throughout the year.

There is ample opportunity for The Lawn Shop to provide the much needed lawn treatments and fertilisers and their own label products are used daily by croquet clubs with excellent results and helpful advice on the use and calibration of equipment to ensure correct application – vital to maintain consistent colour, density and speeds.

Their technical and practical input at a croquet club in South Oxfordshire has seen the fortunes of their four sorry croquet lawns turned around to first class lawns capable of winning the croquet section some excellent bits of silverware in the trophy cabinet. Now the club are able to maintain their lawns themselves, following the maintenance schedule of which the table that follows is a 'live schedule' provided to them so it really works if followed closely each month with some additional input from TLC along the way if required.

During next editions we shall be providing the schedule for the next quarter and by the time we get to the end of the year, you will have the complete set.

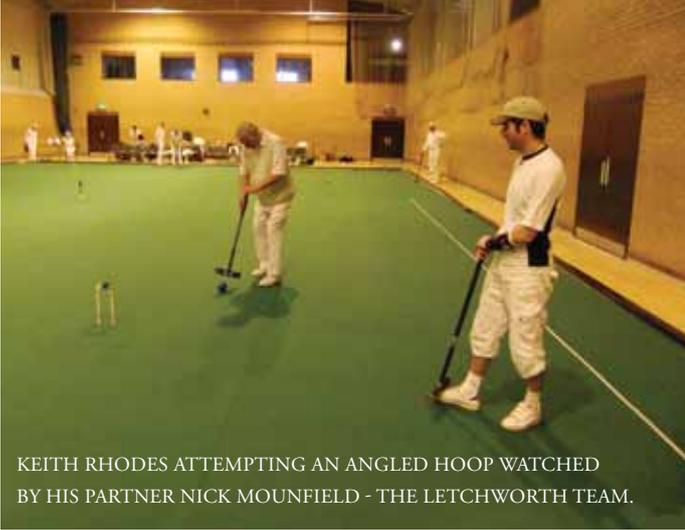
If you require assistance, you will be in safe hands so why not call The Lawn Company on **0870 442 7475** or email Mike Seaton personally on [mike@lawn.co.uk](mailto:mike@lawn.co.uk). He would be pleased to help.

## MONTH-BY-MONTH CROQUET LAWN MAINTENANCE SCHEDULE

It is worth noting that the following should be used as a guide only, but in association with prevailing weather patterns, growing cycles, and ground and soil conditions.

OPERATION	MARCH	APRIL
Aerate	Solid or Slit Tine	Solid or Pencil Tines
Disease Watch	Fusarium	Fusarium & Red Thread
Fertilising	Slow Release MU – 28-3-8	Yes - if not done already but late
Moss Control	Spray Soluble Iron if not done	A bit late if not done
Mowing	John Deere – 10 to 8 mm, 2 times per week	John Deere – 8 to 6 mm, 2 times per week
Pest Watch	Leatherjackets & Chafers	Leatherjackets & Chafers
Renovate	Minor Areas if Mild	None
Scarify	Light if Mild – Wire Reel	Yes – Wire Reel or Verti Cutting
Seed	Localised Areas if Mild	Localised Areas
Selective Weed Control	Yes – if Mild	Ideal Month – End of
Top Dressing	With Seeding	None
Verti Cutting	None	Yes – a little grooming is good
Watering	Maybe	Yes – start this month if windy and/or dry
Wetting Agent	None	Yes – start this month – a must
Additional Functions	Remove Dew each morning with Dew Switch or Drag Brush. Paint Furniture & Hoops & Boards.	Remove Dew each morning. Line Markings & Move Ball Stop Boards.

OPERATION	MAY	JUNE
Aerate	Pencil Tine	Pencil Tine
Disease Watch	Red Thread	Red Thread
Fertilising	Slow Release MU – 28-3-8 End Month	Early Month if not done in Early May
Moss Control	None	None
Mowing	John Deere – 8 to 6 mm, 3 times per week	John Deere – 6 mm, 3 times per week
Pest Watch	Leatherjacket & Chafers	Leatherjacket & Chafers
Renovate	None	None
Scarify	None - See Verti Cutting	None - See Verti Cutting
Seed	Localised Areas if bare	None
Selective Weed Control	Yes – if not done already – start of month and at first sign of Clover	Yes – if not done already but late and if need start of month when Clovers appear
Top Dressing	None	None
Verti Cutting	Yes a few mm under mower cutting height	Yes – every two weeks
Watering	Nightly but monitor quantity	Nightly but monitor quantity
Wetting Agent	Yes Monthly	Yes Monthly
Additional Functions	Remove Dew each morning with Dew Switch or Drag Brush Remove Grass 'Bents' with Verti Cutter before they become a problem.	Remove Dew each morning with Dew Switch or Drag Brush Remove Grass 'Bents' with Verti Cutter before they become a problem.



KEITH RHODES ATTEMPTING AN ANGLED HOOP WATCHED BY HIS PARTNER NICK MOUNFIELD - THE LETCHWORTH TEAM.

## INDOOR CROQUET AT SOHAM – NAKED!

by *Duncan Hector*

Soham is slap bang in the middle of East Anglia and is the home of the region's winter series of indoor croquet events.

The carpet is stored at the Ross Piers Sports Centre and laid out by the staff ready for the day's play. The final touches are done by early players who add white tape to mark boundaries and Hoover up stray bits of something. The hoops are welded to metal plates about a foot square. These plates are surfaced with green material that matches the carpet. The centre peg, corner flags and yard line pegs get similar treatment.

The join between the plate and carpet can be dodgy—deflections happen—so it is best to play outside the plate area. The hoops have an attitude and can be very difficult for first timers. Don't expect to bounce cleanly off the wire, because sure as eggs are eggs your ball will rattle in the jaws and stay there. Hitting harder seems to rile the hoops even more. A soft, "silky smooth" shot works well and means that you have a chance of a rush on the get away ball. Mallet maker Mike Percival uses a sort of upward-top-spin-follow-through which is really irritating because it normally works. His partner Peter Allnutt clicks his heels together as he hits, which is fun to watch until you realise that this method works too!

AC games are 14 point doubles, double banked and there are clocks—giant chess clocks. These are sited at both ends—one set for primary colours and the other for secondaries. Each has a three-way switch. The "Middle Way" stops both clocks and is used for time outs, when the double banked game gets priority. The other "ways" start one clock and stop the other. The timekeeper flicks the switch as soon as a turn ends and clips have been correctly positioned. Clever teams save time by giving their partner the clips to sort out. The coolest way of doing this is to throw the clip at your partner. Richard Smith used to be a good thrower. His throw was a sort of extension to the hoop run with one hand following through to the clip. His partner, Terry Mahoney, soon learnt to be a good catcher! Richard "used to be" (a good thrower) because he has moved away, so we don't see him any more, and Terry is now coaching Mark Lewis who is going to be good. Once you have finished your turn, get off the court ASAP. As soon as you cross the boundary the switch is switched. But some people take the longest possible route which is great for the opponents because the clock keeps on ticking!

If you tread on the court before the oppo has quit, the switch is switched and your clock starts. So this is not a good plan, because you are now saving time for your opponents. All of this relies on the timekeeper actually watching the game rather than chatting or sleeping. It can be frustrating when your opponents are playing but your clock is ticking—it happens! So clock watching can pay.

You play 4, 5 or even 6 games a day dependant on the format and get 25 minutes on the clock for a game, as do your opponents. Handicaps can change everything and there are very special ones devised for Soham. The big guns like Chris Clarke and Robert Fulford used to run rings round everyone, so counter measures had to be deployed. Handicaps are either bisques or mandatory peels and on top of this a reduction in time allocation can be imposed which is added to the opponent's time. This can be quite punishing. When Jack Wicks partnered Jonathan Hills (both -1) they had 3 mandatory peels and lost 2 minutes which was given to their opponents. Oh yes, there is another special rule: a player can't peel his partner through more than 2 hoops.

If you run out of time, you are in a bad place. Bad because you can now only hit single shots—no croquets. Place? I dunno. Meantime your opponents can set things up and make all round breaks virtually unhindered, get their peels done—whatever. Time can be overridingly, quintessentially the most important thing. Can be . . . . ., so all sorts of tactics are used to encourage opponents to waste it. For example, with 5 minutes left on the clock how many hoops can be made? Well, a high handicapper won't get to peg so is bound to be timed out and tactics change completely. The indoor game is really "speed" croquet in which two ball breaks are time efficient and playing inside the box (the rectangle made by the four outer hoops) is very beneficial. This keeps the distances short and time usage short too. The ball runs on for ever on this fast surface and when seconds count, they count. Time efficient teams ensure that partner is ready at the boundary to field balls when shooting. Youngsters (under 60) often run about like mad things to save time, but most people don't do this any more. The standard of East Anglian indoor play has improved so much over the last 20 years that it isn't usually necessary. When five times World Champion Robert Fulford partnered his wife Susan (handicap 24) they had 2 minutes time deduction, yet Robert rarely covered the court at more than a stroll and coached Susan round in a very unhurried manner.

I don't know the size of the carpet. Probably 25 x 20 yards. Small enough for most people to hit a good proportion of long shots. So A and B baulks are shortened from the corner to hoop 1 or hoop 3 making a longer shot to the East boundary. The opening strategy varies. Bear in mind that most people want you to waste time, so they are happy to set up positions that do just that. In answer to a ball level with hoop 4 on the East boundary it used to be a fad to go "ball in corner 3" or even "just out of corner 3" which encouraged a rush to the other ball which rarely worked well and used plenty of time. Occasionally there will be a tice — which is usually hit. Some openings involve all four balls on the East boundary. I won't mention the hoop 1 opening that Susan Fulford has been using with great success when playing with Robert. Not having mentioned it, I can say that when I have used this, the oppos have rarely made a hoop, even when the ball bounces off the hoop (which is normal). *continued >*

# Hearing loss – Listen up!

It is estimated that there are nearly nine million deaf or hard-of-hearing people in the UK. Unfortunately, 'aging' is the main reason we start to hear less well. Two in five of people over 50 suffer some degree of hearing loss. Sometimes a long-term exposure to loud noise, or a trauma, or disease can also be the cause.

If you agree with any of the questions below it is advisable for you to have your hearing tested.

- Do you often have to ask people to repeat themselves?
- Do you have trouble hearing the doorbell, have the TV/radio volume up loud?
- Do you struggle to hear well in noisy places like restaurants or pubs?
- Do people appear to be mumbling making conversations difficult to follow?

## What does a hearing test involve?

- The Hearing Aid Audiologist will ask questions about your lifestyle and past problems with hearing, how your hearing affects you at present, and about any questions you currently have about your hearing.
- Then your ears will be thoroughly examined.
- Next your hearing response will be tested. An audiogram is produced showing the extent of hearing loss or capacity that you have.
- Finally you will have a speech clarity test that determines how well you can understand conversations and speech.
- You will immediately receive a summary of the hearing test from the Hearing Aid Audiologist.
- In rare cases, the tests may reveal a medical condition that must be referred to your GP.



## Hearing Aids

Modern digital hearing aids are not only remarkably effective, but can be almost invisible and unobtrusive, weighing as little as 2 grams. If a hearing aid is recommended, this can normally be fitted within 7-14 days with enormous benefit, although some aids can even be supplied and fitted the same day.

- Better relations with family and friends.
- Feeling better about yourself, with more self-esteem.
- Avoiding the isolation that hearing loss can bring.
- Greater independence and increased confidence.



**0800 740 8680**  
**www.specaids.co.uk**

ROBERT & SUSAN FULFORD  
TIME KEEPING AT SOHAM

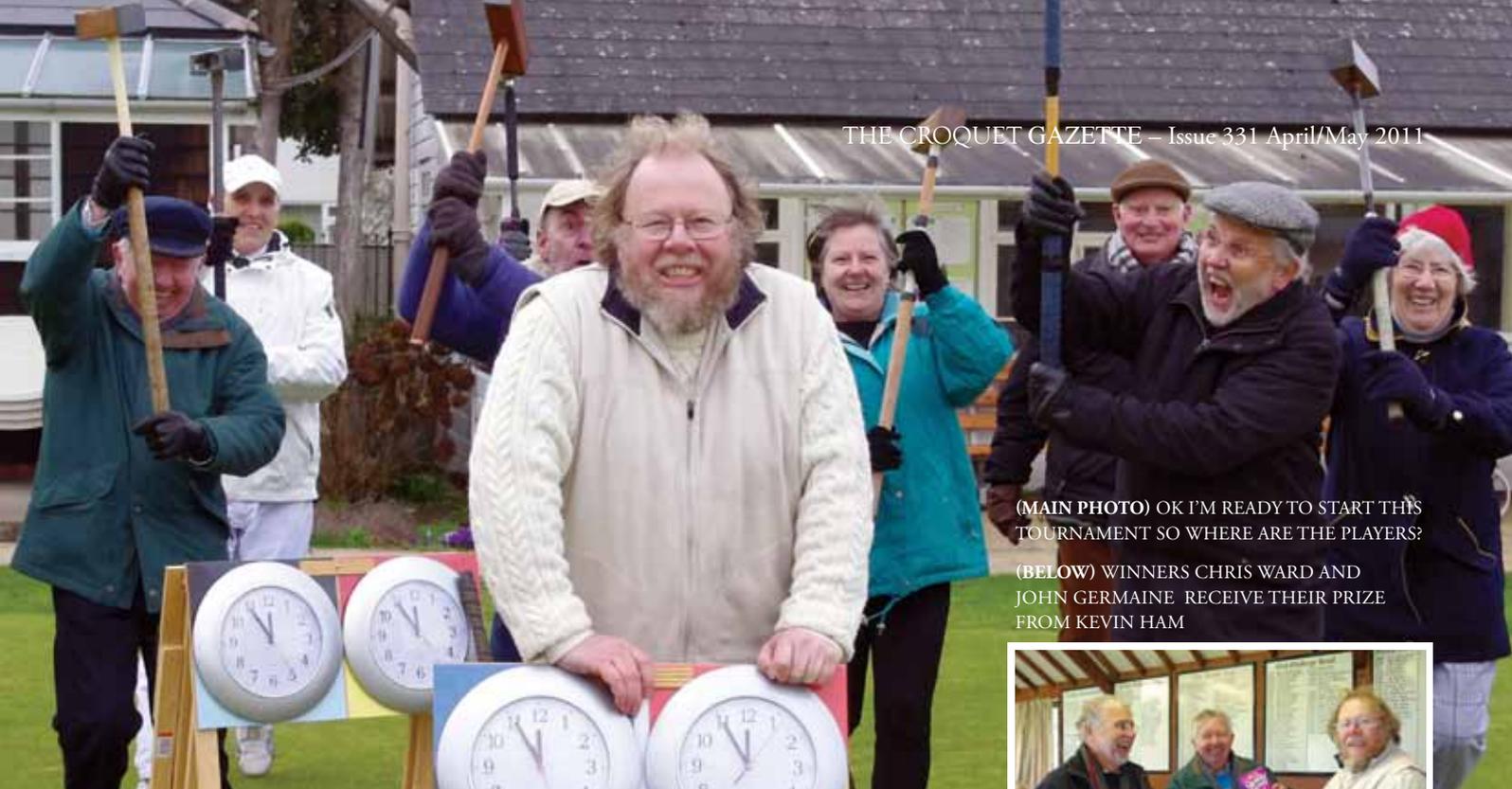


The indoor game is refreshing. The tactics are totally different and it doesn't really matter whether you win or lose, because handicaps and rankings are unaffected. It is played by a bunch of very friendly people and it makes a brilliant contrast to summer croquet. If a club can't make a team then we resort to mixed club entries. So we get teams with odd names like Norchester, Burywich, Letchester and St Alworth. As I said, it is friendly and fun. Games can be very exciting and decided by seconds on the clock. The East Anglian players have been at it for 20 years or more and are very good at it now. Our Manager, Colin Hemming, is trying a variety of new formats including a new partner in each game and alternate stroke doubles. These have proved popular and weekends are more than sold out each time. Colin is very keen to encourage beginners to play at Soham. They are always partnered by a more experienced player, so it is a great way of learning. If you have one spare, Colin deserves a feather in his cap.

What about Golf Croquet on the carpet? This is managed by Chris Howell and there are a couple of weekends given over to GC each winter. I don't know much more, but soon will because I am playing between writing this and your reading it. I haven't played GC on the carpet before and I am partnering Terry Mahoney who encouragingly emailed the other day wanting to know what the rules of GC are!

AC at Soham has become so popular that entries are now rationed and are only open to EACF clubs. If you aren't from East Anglia, you will need a carpet of your own. The last time I heard a price mentioned, it was about £15,000 and you will need a tame leisure centre too. If you want to know more about our winter season, take a look at the East Anglian Croquet Federation Website [www.angliacroquet.co.uk/2010/soham.php](http://www.angliacroquet.co.uk/2010/soham.php).

Why does the headline say naked? ... I was wondering that.



(MAIN PHOTO) OK I'M READY TO START THIS TOURNAMENT SO WHERE ARE THE PLAYERS?

(BELOW) WINNERS CHRIS WARD AND JOHN GERMAINE RECEIVE THEIR PRIZE FROM KEVIN HAM



# CHELTENHAM CROQUET PLAYERS ON SPEED!

By Klim Seabright

**T**welve intrepid club members met on the Old Bath Road lawns to try their hand at Speed Golf Croquet for the first time. Some players, who had previously experienced the Association equivalent of the game, duly turned up with their medical fitness certificates only to find that the GC form of the game is much less frenetic than its Association counterpart.

There are, no doubt, various types of timers that can be used for the game, but Cheltenham stuck to the enlarged chess type clocks, which had recently been made by one of their members for the club's Association Speed Croquet.

Manager/Demonstrator/Organiser Kevin Ham placed the players into pairs in such a way that no pairing was faced with a large number of extra turns. Both low and high handicappers felt this was an excellent idea, which enabled the less experienced players to stand a chance against the 2 and 3 handicappers present.

After a very full explanation by Kevin Ham, play commenced and each pair had an allotted ten minutes lawn time. Everyone thought that this amount of time proved perfectly reasonable and very few games used up the total time allocation. Even when a pair ran out of time, and could no longer score a hoop, there was still the challenge of trying to hold off the "in time" pair from scoring more hoops. In one case the "out time" pair managed to hold out for two and a half minutes.

Games were organised in such a way that two of the pairs were not in play and they then became the time keepers/referees on the two lawns. By trial and error, they arrived at a method

which ensured accuracy in time keeping, and also proved useful to the "in-play" players. One player

operated the rocker switch on the clock and the other player determined when the balls had come to a stop by calling out "stop" or "go". "Go" was found to be better than "stop" and avoided players thinking that time had stopped for some technical reason. Some go/stoppers found it better to follow the game around (without getting in the way) while others shouted their commands while standing next to the clocks.

During the course of the day, each pair played five games and also acted as time keepers for three of the games. This also worked quite well in that play got going at about 9.45 a.m. and finished around 2.45 p.m. which included a sociable forty minute lunch—Alwen Bowker's mulled wine is gaining something of a reputation for improving post lunch play! This is just about the right length of time for a tournament in the winter.

The players all retired to the tea room for a warming cuppa and a chat about their experiences. There was some mention of the need to change one's approach in certain respects. It was felt, for example, that the stop shot which sends the opponent ball a long distance away might be used sparingly, because such a shot would take up a lot of the striker's time. Others felt this was pretty much "as broad as it was long" because the opponent had to hit the return shot at some point.

Players felt that Speed Croquet was good for the game in general, because it encouraged the need to be ready to take the next shot and this would perhaps lead to a shortening in the full GC game.

Some also felt this game would encourage a bolder type of clearance shot, something about which beginners can be a little hesitant. It was particularly pleasing to note that Chris Ward and John Germaine, who have recently joined the club, took the honours on this occasion with four wins from five games.

*All certainly had a most enjoyable game and are clamouring for more. Why not give it a go in your club?*

# Obituaries

## Hyacinth Coombs

Hyacinth Coombs, a well known member of Sussex County Croquet Club, died in January shortly before her 87th birthday. Born in Crays Hill, Essex in 1924, her family moved to the Brighton area in 1928.

Hyacinth married Laurie in 1947, helping him to start his career. He worked for many large companies and together they travelled the world, eventually living in Nottingham where, it is thought, her husband was a senior executive with Boots. On Laurie's retirement they moved to Rottingdean and joined Southwick.

She was a useful player, with experience from other countries and an elegant side stance, but her slender figure did not make it easy for her to play some of the big splits and rolls often required. She was always happy to give coaching and tuition to beginners and improvers. Her tactics were very sound, as her quiet comments to neighbours when watching a match confirmed. She was a keen bridge player and regularly completed the Daily Telegraph crossword.

Every visitor to a tournament at Southwick would know her, for she managed the bar for some 20 years, often laying in special beers as requested by some of the 100 odd competitors in the Inter Counties Championship.

She was a generous contributor to the club's fundraising events, held frequently to keep the ancient buildings standing, and in particular the installation of the automatic watering system. She will be sadly missed by her many croquet friends.

*Jonathan Isaacs*



## Gerry Eccles

Cheltenham Croquet Club lost one of its "stalwarts" when Gerry Eccles passed away. Gerry had to visit hospital each week for dialysis and it was on one such visit that he had some kind of seizure from which he sadly did not recover.

Gerry was a good player in his day but also a man who contributed to his club in so many ways. He was a gentle man who also had a deep interest in music, astronomy and bird-watching. I think the thing which impressed me most about Gerry was that he was such a skilled listener. He was a quiet kind of guy who was always interested in what you were doing and what you had to say. He never made judgements about people, but if he did not agree with what you were saying he would come out with the gentle but rhetorical "Oh, do you really think so?" You then knew that you had probably just said something completely idiotic! I could listen to Gerry for hours, especially when he spoke about

his occupation as a Barber (he would hate "hairdresser"), in the days when Cavendish House had its own "shop" with

lots of "chairs". He came into contact with many actors from the Opera House (Everyman) and classical musicians playing at the Town Hall. I think he secretly enjoyed the look on their faces when he mentioned some obscure opus, rather than enquiring about where they had been on holiday!

Gerry had become rather frail but I remember speaking to him about three weeks before he died. It was my pleasure to inform him that he had been granted honorary membership of the club. I think he was thrilled to bits and quite emotional in his usual quiet way. He told me he was hoping to gather enough strength to rise from his bed to go to one of his much loved lunch-time concerts the next day.

We all miss you down at the club, Gerry.  
*Klim Seabright, Hon.Sec. Cheltenham CC*

## Miss Rita O’Neil 1931 – 2011

Tyneside Croquet Club are deeply saddened to report the death of one of their oldest members, Rita O’Neil. She died peacefully in Rothbury Cottage Hospital on 23rd February after being ill since the cold weather in December. It seems that she died of heart failure, which is somewhat ironic since she was such a kind hearted person.

She joined Tyneside Croquet Club in 2001 and became a skilful Golf Croquet player though her small frame and lady-like style meant she did not employ physically aggressive strokes and was at a disadvantage against harder hitting players. She liked to play on Wednesday mornings with ‘the ladies who don’t hit so hard.’

Nevertheless she was a determined player, who played in club competitions even if she often finished well down the order.

Over the past few years she suffered from chronic pulmonary disease but even though it was a struggle to walk to the club from nearby Jesmond, she kept coming and kept playing even when she had to sit down between games to recover her breath.

We will all miss her good-hearted influence on the club, not least because of her generosity in supplying us with little treats such as special biscuits, sweets, and a lovely bag of jelly snakes for the Snakes and Ladders competition.

*David Turner*



PHOTO BY DEREK WATTS

## Fernando de Ansorena

We were saddened to receive the news that our good friend Fernando de Ansorena had died in February. Well known in England, particularly at south coast clubs, Fernando lived in Jerez, Spain. He was a tireless supporter of croquet there and shortly before his death, had been instrumental in creating lawns at two golf clubs near Cadiz: Costa Balena and Vista Hermosa.

The first time I went to Fernando’s home club, Santa Clara was about 15 years ago, in November. This happened to be one of the coldest months in Andalusia for many years – 40oC! This did not deter Fernando, who was determined to make the most of my visit. Late afternoon as the sun was going down and I was losing all feeling in my hands, we finished a game.

“We play another game”, said Fernando.

“But Fernando, I’m freezing!”

“We play another game!”

So we did.

Faith and I visited Fernando every year or so (except the year he forgot we were coming and went on holiday!) and always enjoyed ourselves immensely.

Fernando enjoyed a cigar, which unfortunately upset his health. He gave up smoking but the damage had been done. Our last visit was in November. He was not a well man but still found the enthusiasm to show us proudly the new clubs he had helped form.

We will miss him greatly as will his relations and many friends, here and in Spain.

Those interested in some pictures of the three clubs can view them on my web site at [www.faydon.com/Bear/Jerez.html](http://www.faydon.com/Bear/Jerez.html)

*Don Gaunt*

# Contacts

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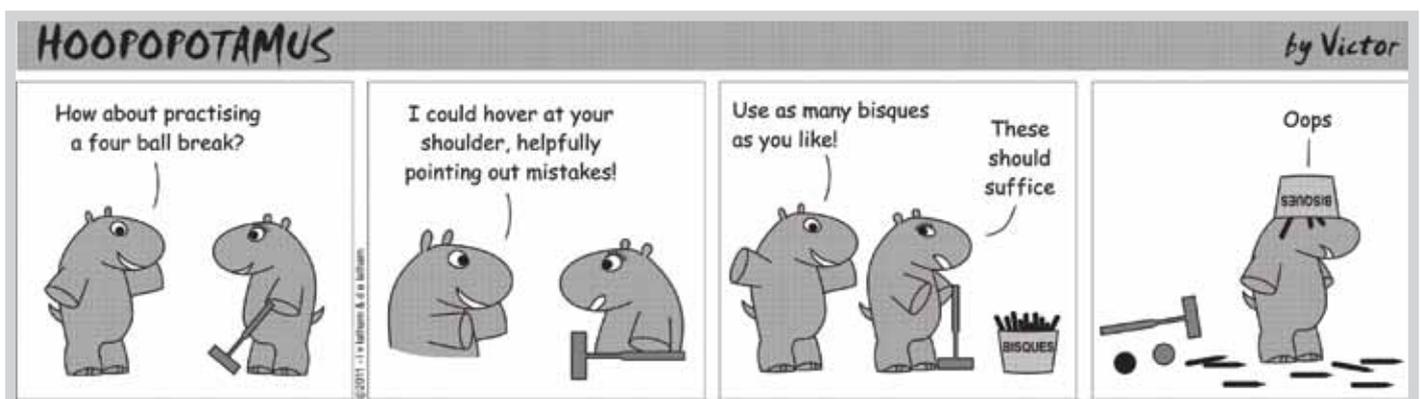
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