

SOUTHERN CROQUET FEDERATION

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting

held at Winchester Tennis and Squash Club on Saturday 19th MARCH 2011

Present: Martin Brandt (Chairman & Basingstoke), Jim Bartlett (Secretary & Harwell), John Munro (Development Officer), Norma Rayne (Golf Croquet Officer & Thames Valley), Pat Kennett (Federation Representative to the CA), Brian Fisk (Handicap Officer & Coaching Officer), Steve Woolnough (Reading & Aldermaston), Dave Morgan (White Horse), Ian Burn (White Horse), Jo Burnaby (Winchester), Richard Harris (Ryde), Roy Tillcock (Ryde), Robin Thornton (Ryde), Alan Truckell (Ryde), Ian Harrison (Basingstoke), Richard Keighley (Wingrave), Richard Jenkins (Hamptworth), Raymond Wood (Phyllis Court), Pam Mead (Phyllis Court), Pauline Wood (Phyllis Court), Sylvia Thomson (Phyllis Court), Frances Colman (Phyllis Court), Chris Roberts (Phyllis Court) and Geoff Youd (High Wycombe).

- 1. Apologies for Absence.** Rita Nunn (Treasurer & Winchester), Paul Wolff (Blewbury), Margaret Skeldon (Lymington), William Gee (OUCC)
- 2. Minutes of the Last AGM.** The minutes were agreed, and signed by Martin Brandt (Chairman). All actions had been taken.
- 3. Matters Arising.** There were no matters arising.
- 4. Chairman's Report.**

The Chairman thanked the Committee members for all their efforts over the past year and those taking the trouble to come to the AGM. Norma Rayne and John Munro had decided it was time for them to retire from the Committee and the Chairman had presented an Orchid to Norma and a CA Diploma to John on behalf of the SCF for all they had done over the years

5. Secretary's Report.

Jim reported the sudden sad death of Anthony Cox of Dogmersfield Club.

There had been numerous changes of officers within the clubs (Basingstoke, Blewbury, Harwell, High Wycombe, Lymington, Oxford University, Reading and Winslow).

Reading Club, although now without its grounds at Reading University, now play at Aldermaston and will continue to operate as a club.

A fully revised list of details (name, role, telephone number, address, email address) of all club contacts will be sent after this meeting to the Club Secretaries. We cannot put this information onto our website.

We will gradually put more information onto the website and that will mean that club members will be less reliant on their club secretary to distribute news. e.g. minutes of all Committee meetings, up-to-date results from fixtures. A standard scoring sheet in GC will facilitate easy accurate updates to the site.

Jim had been invited to volunteer to provide "croquet tours" at the National Trust property Chastleton House (Moreton in the Marsh) once or twice weekly. He declined.

There had been much correspondence regarding the new GC Rules. This is a special agenda item for today, as requested and the objective is to form a complete or majority consensus.

Jim listed the benefits offered from the Federation:

- support from the Federation (and, via the Federation, from the C.A.) including club development support (e.g. free professional advice on lawn improvements and C.A. funding support, where approved)
- free coaching for all members of all member clubs
- the services of a Federation handicapper
- the opportunity for all members of all member club to participate in Federation non-league activities (e.g. the Solstice GC Tournament, the Armada AC Tournament, Referee coaching courses, coach coaching courses and player development courses.).
- the opportunity for all members of all member club to participate in any of the 4 leagues.

Numerous minor changes to the SCF Constitution are required. e.g. IoW is not part of the County of Hampshire. The Committee will suggest the appropriate changes and present the revised text for approval at the 2012 AGM.

On a personal note, Jim has been heavily involved with Blewbury Croquet Club for several years - Secretary (6 years), Treasurer (4 years), GC Captain, Facility Manager, helped with the lawns, etc. He estimated that 35% of his daylight hours, 24/7, during last season were given over to BCC. He has now have resigned from all duties and left the club. He intends to put more time into Harwell Croquet Club and into promoting the sport via courses for the Women's Institute, etc.

6. Treasurer's Report.

Rita presented the Income & Expenditure report for 1 January 2010 to 31 December 2010 (filed with these minutes).

The Coaching Officer can reclaim travel expenses from SCF funds when payment hasn't been made by the club concerned.

Brian was requested to indicate on the website which clubs were Full Members and which were Associate Members.

The SCF does not carry any insurance - there is no perceived need.

The website should show the equipment that it owns and who has custody of it.

7. Golf Croquet Officer's Report.

Ten clubs entered this league in 2009 when it was split into a North/South arrangement. For 2010, a further 5 clubs participated, and again we had a North/South split. This was a very pleasing season. The semi-finalist clubs were Phyllis Court, Ryde, Thames Valley and Winchester. Winchester beat Phyllis Court in the final which was held at Blewbury.

The Solstice GC Challenge Tournament took place at Phyllis Court in 2010 and the winners were Charlie Von Schmieder and T.J. Martin Brandt presented the cups and medals. The entries (doubles in each case) were Hamptworth (1), Winchester (2), Dogmersfield (1), Thames Valley (2), Wingrave (1), Phyllis Court (4), Eynsham (2), Blewbury (1), and Winslow (2). Unusually, Ryde did not offer any entrants (clash of dates).

The 2011 Solstice GC Challenge will take place at Hamptworth on June 19.

8. Association Croquet Officer's Report.

Oxford University won the Northern Division and Ryde the Southern Division. Oxford University conceded the play-off Final so Ryde were the Champions. In the Secretary's Shield the SCF Champions from 2009, Hamptworth, had done very well and had got to the Final.

Advanced Croquet League:

Blewbury were the winners of the League

9. Coaching Officer's Report

In 2010 the only formal courses we ran were a Laws course in March, an advanced GC course in April and a Bronze course in September – most poorly attended. We will be repeating the laws course and the Bronze in 2011 though I have already cancelled the laws course due to low numbers. We are also running a Coaches Training Course (CTC) on 9th and 10th April at Hamptworth. This course will qualify people to coach (either AC or GC or both) in their own clubs.

I attended the November and February CA Coaching Committee meetings. I don't believe that there is much to report as most of the matters discussed were routine and major projects, such as a new coaching manual, are progressing slowly. I believe that this has already been covered in the Council Rep's report as Pat is on the same committee.

I am happy to provide further coaching this year either by myself or other coaches if asked. Please note however that if clubs wish coaches to attend their clubs to provide coaching they should be prepared to reimburse their reasonable expenses.

There does appear to be a marked reluctance of the part of croquet players in the SCF to travel to receive coaching. I am sure that many people do receive informal coaching within their own clubs but with our limited resources it is difficult to get around all the clubs to offer formal coaching. I would welcome some constructive suggestions as to how we can motivate people to want coaching enough to be prepared to travel. I assume, and perhaps I am wrong here, that every club has someone responsible for coaching and that when they want some help and advice they will contact me. It may well be a problem of communication. Perhaps if everyone went back from the AGM to their clubs and asked their coaching officers to contact me to talk through their needs we might be able to find some common ground for running more courses.

I have also done a lot of work on an SCF web site. A facility to allow AC league results was written but not used in the 2010 season. I will extend this work to cover the GC leagues as well for 2011. It is expected that this will become the default method of reporting results and enable people to view the league tables at any time. It may also alert me, as the handicapping officer, to handicapping anomalies within the Federation. For 2011 this work will be reported on by the SCF Web Master (by default me unless we have any other competent volunteers.)

10. Handicapping Officer's Report

Most of my activities over the past year have related to advice about Golf Croquet (GC) handicaps and helping to set up a handicap GC league for the Federation. There have also been some moves within the Croquet Association to clarify my role and responsibilities as a CA handicappers. Bill Arliss wishes to have separate GC and AC CA handicappers and he also believes that clubs should have both an AC and a GC handicapper. I'm sure in time this will get resolved for the time being I shall continue to work with both forms of the sport where I can. As far as club handicappers are concerned my view is that one person can do both roles but if you have willing volunteers why not have two. Either way each club should have at least one

person responsible for setting and adjusting handicaps. I will provide what help and support I can to club handicappers.

As your Handicapping Officer I have felt it my duty to help establish handicap GC in the federation. The best way to do that seemed to me to have a handicap GC league. I have therefore been active in consulting with clubs and encouraged your committee to set up such a league for 2011. I have also been trying to update the rules for the GC leagues in the Federation. This work is not yet complete as we do not have complete agreement on all aspects of the rules however we have a debate on the matter later in the meeting after which I will amend the existing drafts and publish them for the forthcoming season.

Nothing to report regarding AC handicapping.

11. Development Officer's Report

Report by John Munro, Development Officer.

Since the last AGM I have attended the scheduled two meetings of the Development Committee in November 2010 and in February 2011..

Grant Applications

High Wycombe

The expected grant application from High Wycombe is deferred, as a new site is still being sought with Hazlemere Recreation Ground a possibility, these negotiations are still at an early stage. The club is hoping to be able to continue playing at their old site Bassetbury Manor in the coming season.

Lymington

This club was hoping to construct another court and had been promised financial assistance from the Lymington and Pennington Town Council who have at last made moves to getting the whole of the Woodside area assessed for drainage purposes with a view to improving all the facilities. The council is aware of the club's need for another court and will keep them involved with future plans.

The club has a new Chairman Margaret Skeldon who has taken over from Sheila Ward. Last season they had 57 members on the books with 32 regular players on their single court.

Bransgore.

I was contacted by their Chairman Graham Williams who said they were having problems with the second court and asked if someone with expertise could assist.

The Federation Lawns Advisory Group representative has retired on ill health grounds and George Noble from Surbiton agreed to visit the club. He suggested that the court be raised in height to solve the problem. The club have obtained quotations to have the necessary work done without seeking financial help from other sources.

Clubs that received start up equipment from the CA in the last 5 years were contacted and I can report as follows:

White Horse

The club has a membership of 31, not all active. They are looking at ways of attracting new members and will display posters, advertise in the local press and organise an Open Day at the beginning of the forthcoming season. They play GC with 4 members playing AC. There was an introduction to AC in 2010 and another coaching session will be held if there is sufficient support.

The standard of play has improved over the past two years due to increased competitiveness and the introduction of internal club competitions. They now play in the Federation GC League and arrange friendly matches with other clubs. They have now been in existence for 3 years and say the equipment received from the CA was much appreciated and have since been able to buy additional equipment.

Wingrave

The club continues to thrive, the membership remaining stable at 25. The club has a qualified GC coach who organised coaching within the club in addition to a CA coaching course at Watford attended by six of their members. Further work has been carried out at their court, which is now three quarter size and a second hand mower acquired from Wrest Park. They entered two GC competitions organised by the federation, winning the one held at Eynsham and they also competed in the GC League gaining valuable experience.

Their court is not yet ready to stage league matches but they intend to enter the GC League again and to play more friendlies. They now have the use of a former cricket pavilion and intend to improve the facilities it provides for their members and visiting players

Southampton University

As reported previously the new club equipment provided by the CA has been recovered from this defunct club and has been deployed to Lymington thanks to the efforts of Sheila Ward.

Requests from prospective new clubs

The CA office passed on a request for assistance to support a staff social event this summer at Chamberlayne College for the Arts at Weston, Southampton. I contacted the teacher involved, Nicky Whiteman, and confirmed that the Federation will provide assistance at the event in June.

The school has recently become a Foundation Trust school working closely in partnership with a local junior school and two infant schools. As these relationships continue to bond Chamberlayne is keen to ensure that they work as a staff team to benefit children and are able to offer something different which may have the potential to be adapted to be played at schools at different ages such as GC. After the forthcoming staff social they would like to see if a club can be set up at Chamberlayne for community and schools participation in the summer months.

I was contacted by Angela Searle who was previously a member at Phyllis Court and who is hoping to form a club in the village of Great Gaddesden in Hertfordshire. As this falls within the East Anglia federation I got in touch with the DO who will contact Ms Searle.

I have just had a request via a member of the South East Federation, from a Principal of a college in Maidenhead, who is interested in creating a centre for so called "minority sports" to extend the experiences of teenagers and thought that croquet would be an excellent choice of sport for this concept. I acknowledged his email and arranged to contact him shortly to arrange a meeting.

The Southern Federation Committee has decided to purchase a set of croquet equipment from the CA office for use in arranging demonstrations to encourage prospective new clubs two of which are scheduled in April and June and hope to take delivery soon.

12. Regional Representative's Report

Since I last reported to the AGM I have attended the CA AGM on 16 Oct 2010; Council Meetings on 16 Oct 2010, 22 Jan 2011 and 26 March 2011; Coaching 13 Nov 2010 and 19 Feb 2011; Development 20 Nov 2010 and 12 Feb 2011; and Management 11 Dec 2010 and 5 Feb 2011. As expected I was unable to attend the meetings on 10 Jul but since Sep I have steadily become much better.

I try to keep you informed about decisions made in the CA Council which is the final decision-making body of the CA, and to feed back to Council any opinions or observations of the Federation. I also give you information from the committees of which I am a member. Here is a digest of what has happened in the CA this year.

The **Club Handbook**, which some of you may be familiar with, was published each year and sent to secretaries of clubs for them to display somewhere where their members would be able to have access. It listed a great deal of information but anecdotal evidence showed that few used it, many did not even know of its existence. In future a newsletter, very much abbreviated, will be sent each year. Most information will be found on the CA website www.croquet.org.uk, especially items which need to be updated annually. Research has shown that most club members have access to the internet and this is thought to be a more efficient way of giving information and emphatically a great deal cheaper. The conditions for the award of **CA Diplomas** now include services to Federations. You might like to consider applying for a diploma for someone in your club who has done long service.

In Coaching Committee we were told a new edition of the Guide to Golf Croquet is now on sale. It was suggested that clubs should aim at a certain number of coaches according to their membership numbers e.g. CTC qualified, plus Grade 1/white badge holder for 30 members. Coach of the Year is to be Michael Lester of Budleigh Salterton.

A **club coach, CTC, course** is being run by Pat and Brian at Hamptworth on 9/10 April. This shows you how to coach as opposed to what to coach, is a necessary pre-requisite for anyone wanting to go on to be a Graded Coach and makes you more effective if you do informal coaching in your own club.

In **Development Committee** it was reported that High Wycombe is struggling to find a new home but it seems likely that they have at last found one in Hazlemere (a district of High Wycombe). I expect others will have more up-to-date news on this. This is looking as if it will be a common problem as there are other clubs who have lost their 'home' because of the general economic situation especially those supported by their local authority. As chairman of Development Committee I have ensured that extra funds will be made available if this is necessary. The **CA Awards to clubs** for outstanding progress in the development of their club will this year go to Bury and Swindon (Townsend) and Chester (Apps Heley). In 2010 the Committee awarded over £21,000 to clubs for development. In future more is to be made available although no application has previously been turned down because funds were short.

Management Committee has decided that minutes of all committees will be made available to the members, so if you are a CA member you can now browse on the Papers, Minutes, etc page but you must login before you will be given access. The election procedure for Federation Representatives to Council is to be simplified.

Don't forget the **GC World Championship** which is to be held at Surbiton and Hurlingham on the 18 -24 July. Get your tickets on line in advance as it is much cheaper, free if you are a CA Member. Entry is by ticket only.

All Committees, especially Council, have been involved with the future policy for the CA. Three detailed reports have wended their way through the committee structure and will be presented to Council, when complete, for approval. I will say more about the Growth and Recruitment Policy, Financial Review, and Strategic Objectives at the meeting. As it has turned out they are very much interconnected although each was researched and reported independently. In brief, the Council sets the overall policy of the CA fairly regularly although not quite annually. All committees then have to make sure their own decisions or recommendations conform before presenting them to Management for ratification. Concern was expressed in Council that croquet played in many clubs was no longer competitive. Research showed this was so and this informed the Growth and Recruitment Policy being prepared by Marketing and the Strategic Objectives. Some strong recommendations have emerged.

Southern Federation Clubs were mentioned in part of the evidence and it is largely this that I will address in the meeting. Here is the quote from the report. Please remember that the full report

has not yet been approved by Council and may yet be radically changed but I think we should do something about this. Our Federation Development Officer has worked very hard in his time and he has been instrumental in encouraging new groups and many development plans of established clubs but a response to this research requires something more proactive than the Federation has been used to. It may need more than one enthusiast – perhaps more in the nature of a small team. Can we do something? For the avoidance of doubt I personally supplied none of this data although, as you know, I was a member of the working party.

Geography

If a new strategy is to fuel croquet growth then it seems there are two approaches:

- the passive, where a universal demand is created and clubs currently in the right place take advantage of it, but much demand goes unsatisfied;
- Or a more active approach to generate interest in specific places by forming or expanding clubs.

The spread of croquet clubs is very patchy. To take two examples:

- The CA website lists no fewer than 26 croquet clubs situated on or near the South Coast.
- In the whole of Berkshire, which includes conurbations such as Slough, Windsor, Maidenhead, Reading and Wokingham, there are only two small clubs (Aldermaston and Caversham), each of which have just a handful of members.

Indeed, the Southern Federation as a whole does not have the critical mass to develop clubs and so it resembles a croquet desert. With its huge catchment potential should Berkshire, and other similar areas, be targeted for special treatment?

A further argument for growth in specific places is that by far the greatest influence on people taking up croquet is the proximity of a local club to where they live or work. 70% said this is an influence and 25% said it is the greatest influence. A beginner might travel up to five miles, but not fifty. **More detailed research into the areas which ‘most need’ a new croquet club could prove interesting.**

The problem with this first analysis is that it ignores very promising areas which have some croquet facilities, but nowhere near enough to satisfy the promise. While we continue to work on this, three examples can be provided:

1. Reading (143K) + Wokingham (150K) = 293K. The potential here is obscured by there being a club (Caversham) in north Reading, having one lawn and 15 members.
2. Slough (119K) + Maidenhead & Windsor (134K) = 253K. In this case there is not one small club within the area, but three at the edge: High Wycombe (one lawn, 30 members and said to be about to close), Phyllis Court (two lawns, 29 members - an exclusive ‘country club’) and Ealing (two lawns, 19 members).
3. Birmingham (977K) displays both problems. It has Edgbaston (three lawns, 47 members) near its centre and Stourbridge (two lawns, 12 members) at its SW periphery. But surely the country’s second largest city could sustain one or two large clubs.

To perform these analyses based on raw population data does nothing to identify areas rich in ‘the right sort of croquet player’ And so it would be useful if the next stage were to be similar analyses based, not on total population, but on a subset representing ‘professionals’, graduates or ABC1s. This is being explored.

But even if such areas are identified does the CA have the resources to start new clubs in ‘green-field’ or ‘arid’ areas, or even to develop underperforming existing clubs?

If not then could it be a catalyst? Supposing for instance that it was decided that both larger universities and sizeable cities with no club should be targeted. An approach to Reading University, which has lots of spare land on its campus, to help start a club for the benefit of students and the local community, could be successful.

Despite all this attractive theorising it must be said that **most clubs are started simply because there is one person, or a small group of enthusiasts who spot an opportunity** to start a club. In this way a few clubs spring up in the most unlikely places - such as Hamptworth (rural Wiltshire) and the Bear of Rodborough (rural Gloucestershire) - but most are in areas with a sizeable catchment. **And so the current CA response to requests for help to begin new clubs should continue.**

13. New Rules for the Two GC Leagues

Brian presented provisional rules for the GC leagues and, after some discussion, an agreement was reached. Brian would issue the revision shortly.

14. Armada Tournament 2011

Already discussed.

15. Solstice Tournament 2011

Already covered.

16. Election of Officers

Jim reported on how long the current officers had served on the Committee:

Martin: 8 years

Pat: Many years (3 year stints)

Brian: Many years in both capacities

Norma: Many years (1999 ?)

John: 5 years

Rita: 4 years

Jim: 3 years

John and Norma had decided to stand down at this AGM.

There was only one nomination for GC Officer (replacing Norma) - Jim Bartlett.

There was only one nomination for Development Officer (replacing John Munro) - Chris Roberts

There was only one nomination for Club Member Representative (replacing Richard, who had resigned earlier in the year) - Frances Colman.

Jim, Chris and Frances were duly elected. All other officers were re-elected en masse.

17. Presentations of Trophies

18. AOB.

19. Date of Next AGM. The date of the 2012 AGM was provisionally set for Saturday 17th March, again at the Winchester Squash & Tennis Club.

Jim Barlett-Secretary