

ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS CROQUET CLUB

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON SATURDAY, DECEMBER 11TH 2004 AT 10.30 a.m. in FRANT

Present: John HOBBS (Chairman), John TIMMIS (Treasurer), Mick BELCHAM (Secretary), Richard CLARK, Pamela CLARK, Derek CROCOMBE, Nita DAVIS, Jon DIAMOND, Derek HEATH, Jean HEATH, Barney LEWIS, Colin MABEY, Sue MABEY, Ray MEECH, Roger MORRIS, Pauline MORRIS, Stan OXENBURY, Miriam READER, Kay SCHAPIRA.

PRELIMINARY

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies from those unable to attend were noted. There were no Matters Arising from the Minutes of the 2003 AGM which were duly signed by the Chairman.

1. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

A very successful year in terms of growing membership – we now have 53 members. We should probably set a realistic maximum of 75 so we still have plenty of room for growth.

We have had a successful year in terms of interclub competition. In the Association U League we won all three matches that we played but, because we gave our fourth opponents a walk-over, we could only reach 6th position (out of 16). In the Association B League we were 13th (equal) out of 18 and in the Golf League we were 10th out of 17. The objective of the Club is not all about being number one, it is to ensure the maximum number of members participate and enjoy the experience.

A team visited Chartwell for a successful days play. We intend to repeat this event next year as well as to schedule two similar visits to the National Trust's Ightham Mote.

The Chairman noted that he had played very little this year due to moving house but intended to do more next year, especially more coaching.

He also thanked the Committee members for their hard work and noted how diverse and qualified they were. He thanked them individually for their contributions.

2. TREASURER'S REPORT

The Treasurer reviewed the Accounts for year ending September 30th 2004 and highlighted a number of points concerning comparisons with the previous year.

The generous donations from 29 members (amounting to an average of £45 each) gave us a total of over £1600 (including the resultant "tax break") shown in the lower section of the Accounts under "Grants/Donations Received".

Regarding the figures for Groundsmen and Lawn Maintenance, the apparently significant variations with 2003 were because:

- Potentially £350 of the Groundsmen figure could be redefined as Lawn Maintenance
- The 2003 figure for Lawn Maintenance of £161 had in fact been "subsidised" with £800 from that year's Ball/Lawn Fund so a more appropriate figure for comparison would be £961.

Traditionally there has been a high level of variation in the annual costs of Groundsmen and Lawn Maintenance due to the weather and the various lawn improvement initiatives.

The Surplus of Income over Expenditure of £207 indicates that at their present levels the Annual Subscriptions (and other income items) just about cover the annual costs of running – but not developing – the Club.

We could potentially consider around £4000 of the £5264 in our "reserves" as being available for the proposed lawn improvements while still providing a reasonable cushion for unexpected expenses.

The Treasurer encouraged members to be as generous with their donations next year as they had in this, especially given the expected costs of the proposed lawn improvements.

The acceptance of the Accounts was proposed by Barney Lewis and seconded by Pamela Clark. They were passed unanimously.

3. LAWNS, EQUIPMENT AND FACILITIES.

Richard Clark reviewed the background to the lawn improvement proposal.

- At last year's AGM we agreed that something radical needed to be done and that we would ask for member donations towards a "fighting fund". This fund resulted in increased income of over £1600.
- Our highest priority has been the removal of the deep levels of thatch that we inherited from the original tennis courts. No amount of hollow tining and top dressing has impacted this significantly. This has become particularly obvious on lawn 3 where additional efforts and cost have been expended in the last couple of years to no avail
- A laser level survey quantified how bad Lawn 1 is in terms of overall level and the significance of the already recognised "humps and bumps"
- In summary, our lawns are so bad that a number of members (particularly ladies) are no longer able to hit a ball the length of the lawn and our visiting tournament players from other clubs are, increasingly, not returning to play another year.
- The Committee appointed a sub-committee to review potential ways forward with particular interest in likely costs and potential funding sources. Members were Richard Clark, Roger Morris and John Timmis.
- Initial assessments were that it would cost £10,000+ to re-turf each lawn.
- A meeting was held with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council to explore opportunities. While the presentation was well received, there would appear to be little chance of significant financial help in the short term.
- The Croquet Association offers grants potentially of £5000 for significant development projects while the South Eastern Croquet Federation may help to the tune of £1000
- We are continuing to talk to the Borough Council's new Sports Development Officer about potential ways forward.

Roger Morris reviewed the options.

- To attempt to level each lawn purely through the selective addition of top dressing would require approximately 65 tons and, even if practical, in that quantity would simply kill the grass.
- We sought recommendations from 3 contractors - a national turfing company, a local sports ground contractor and a local lawn maintenance contractor in order to obtain a range of opinions and prices. (see Discussion Paper of December 2nd 2004).
- The re-turfing option is the one that has been followed by most clubs in the past though the Croquet Association's expert now believes that re-seeding provides, in the long term, a better lawn. The advantage of re-turfing is that the lawns would be available for play early in the year following the re-turfing in the autumn. The problem of seeding is that play will have to cease in early to mid September and could have to be "rationed" early in the following season

- depending on the autumn and winter weather. But the significant advantage of seeding over turfing is cost – potentially a third of the re-turfing cost.
- If we follow the re-seeding route, we will investigate ways in which any disruption can be minimised – using the Bowling Club's lawn? Playing Friendly matches away? Visiting other clubs on Club Afternoons? Etc.
- The third option – "radical scarifying" with a Graden Scarifier – is revolutionary as a way of destroying thatch but does nothing to address the level and flatness of the lawns.
- Either of the first two options (turfing or seeding) would need us to:
 - Provide some form of irrigation system to protect our investment
 - Budget for significantly higher annual Groundsmen and Lawn Maintenance costs
- For irrigation we have two options:
 - Basic: which would require someone present during lawn watering to position and move sprinklers/hoses
 - Automatic: which would organise the watering on a timer basis and utilise pop-up sprinkler heads
- Either way, the water pressure currently available at the Clubhouse is insufficient for direct watering – one or more holding tanks (with associated pumping capability) will be necessary
- A preliminary budget for the re-seeding option plus an automatic irrigation system would be in the region of £15,000.

Richard Clark then summarised and proposed the way forward. In terms of funding

- We can probably obtain £5000 from the external sources we are already targeting – the CA, the SECF and the Borough Council.
- We already have, say, £4000 of our own funds
- That would leave us with a further £6000 to find from other sources, principally our own members
- Given the level of this years donations together with our growing membership this should be entirely possible within a feasible timeframe

Concerns expressed and debated by the meeting related to:

- The depth, quality and compactness of the surface prior to re-seeding
- Whether the Borough Council's intention to raise the height of the fence between ourselves and the basket ball courts would reduce the number of incursions to retrieve balls
- How we can reduce our exposure to the risk of damaging storms if we follow the re-seeding route – especially via holding the contractor liable (!)
- The potential of raising the height of the fence all round to prevent mischief – incursion or the throwing of rubbish
- Whether or not irrigation might still be relevant either
 - If we decide eventually not to replace the lawns in the foreseeable future, or
 - For the 2005 season even if we do intend to replace the lawns that autumn
- How much the lawns could be improved via diagonal cutting rather than the normal "north-south"
- Whether or not the current groundsmen were able to give the lawns the necessary commitment (especially if we re-seed) given that it is only their evening job
- How we could
 - Minimise the potential damage to re-seeded lawns through control of Club Afternoons, and
 - On a more permanent basis, follow "good lawn management practice" of starting the season later and finishing it earlier

The Chairman then asked the meeting

- Are we moving in the right direction?
- Do we have the members' approval to proceed towards refining our proposals and presenting them for final membership approval at an Extraordinary General Meeting in the early summer of next year?

The decision of the meeting to proceed as proposed was unanimous.

4. TOURNAMENTS AND COMPETITIONS

The Secretary reviewed the past year's programme:

- We held nine internal competitions this year. These were broadly as per previous years except that, for Golf Croquet, the Rose Bowl was open to all handicap ranges and a High Bisquers tournament had replaced the Golf Croquet Ladder
- We repeated last year's programme of four external Association tournaments – two High Bisquers, one Open Handicap and one Open Advanced. Our members – Michael Brown and Chris Barham – won the two High Bisquers
- Regarding our interclub matches, our Golf teams were particularly impressive – in our first year in the Golf League we managed a credible position in the middle of the field while, more importantly, our doubles team won the south-eastern championship!!
- At an individual level we have two other champions – John Hobbs who won the CA Senior Doubles Championship and Miriam Reader who won this year's Medway High Bisquers Tournament

5. COACHING AND HANDICAPPING

The Chairman listed the three "categories" of players in the club – those that play for pleasure only (often doubles Golf games) that have no impact on their handicap, those that are interested in improving but have an "oscillating" handicap (as many wins as losses) and those that are attempting to improve and see their handicap as a reflection of how far they have got. Our coaching programme will at least focus on this latter group. Club afternoons provide an excellent opportunity for this activity. In addition we will continue last year's initiative of providing Thursday evening individual Association coaching.

Other topics were:

- The idea of having paid coaching lessons (to increase club funds)
- Formal group coaching sessions will be introduced next year as "mentoring" was not the success it was hoped to be.
- Perhaps we should arrange a day's (paid) "Summer School" similar to other clubs.
- Perhaps a coaching session could be arranged for the hour or two prior to Club Afternoons

6. CLUB AFTERNOONS

These continue to be the "success story" of the club and being very instrumental in the growth of membership numbers. We should not worry about scheduling competitive singles games during Club Afternoons as there are typically insufficient people (even when 14 – 16 are there) to occupy all lawns

7. MEMBERSHIP, SUPPORT AND SUBSCRIPTIONS

Hazel Moss-Davis was proposed by the Committee to become an Life Honorary Member as a result of her generous donation of sufficient funds to build the existing Clubhouse. The Meeting agreed unanimously and the Secretary was deputed to inform her of the Meeting's decision. The Committee was also asked to arrange for a presentation to her of a suitable gift to express the Club's

appreciation.

Regarding Support and Subscriptions, the Secretary reminded the Meeting of the Club's policy to fund basic club maintenance through the Annual Subscriptions and any development (new equipment, lawn improvements etc.) through Voluntary Contributions. This was for three reasons:

- That it maximises the tax benefit to be gained from our tax status as a Community Amateur Sports Club
- That at a time when significant funding was required for potential lawn improvements, the additional burden that this would place upon individual members would be dependent upon each member's ability to help
- That the required rise to Annual Subscriptions to provide an equivalent level of income would deter a significant number of new members

We should be aware however that Golf Clubs, for instance, require all members to pay equally, both for maintenance and development, through their annual subscriptions.

The Committee proposed that:

- For new members in 2005, the Annual Subscription rates should be:
 - Full Membership:
 - First Year: £ 75
 - Thereafter: £100
 - Student Membership: £ 30
- However, for existing members, the 2004 distinction between first and second year members would continue to apply i.e. the first and second years would remain at £50 and £75 respectively.
- In order to cater for exceptional or unforeseen circumstances, these rates may be varied by the Club's Officers when deemed appropriate.
- The existing schedule of Green Fees for visitors (i.e. £5 for a full day, £3 for a half day) would continue to be applicable for 2005

These proposed Subscription and Green Fee rates for 2005 were agreed unanimously.

8. COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLICITY

Jon Diamond reviewed some of our successes this year and our plans for next – specifically:

- More articles and press releases
- More publicity help from within i.e. via members
- More professional/available publicity leaflets, posters and application forms
- Using "leaflet drops" especially in the vicinity of the Club and especially for events such as Open Days.
- Continuing to improve the club's website
- Issuing regular Club Newsletters.

Suggestions were made:

- To seek new members from local Bridge Clubs
- To publish competition and tournament results in the Courier Newspaper

9. ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

Upon the retirement of John Hobbs as Chairman, Richard Clark was nominated as his replacement. His election was proposed/seconded and passed unanimously. The other two Officers (Treasurer

and Secretary) as well as the remainder of the Committee (including John Hobbs) were seeking re-election and were duly elected unopposed and unanimously.

The Committee then for 2005 is as follows:

Chairman Richard Clark

Treasurer John Timmis

Secretary Mick Belcham

Committee Jon Diamond , Derek Heath, John Hobbs, Colin Mabey and Roger Morris

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

A vote of thanks was proposed (and unanimously agreed) to Richard Clark and Roger Morris for their efforts relating to the proposed lawn improvements

A vote of thanks was also proposed (and unanimously agreed) to John Hobbs for his efforts as our Chairman

11. PRESENTATION OF PRIZES

The Chairman presented the Club Trophies as follows:

Barney Lewis Spa Salver

Calverley Cup

Richard Clark Association Ladder

Nita Davis Howell Cup for High Bisquers

John Hobbs Golf Croquet Rose Bowl

John Timmis Lustau Sherry Cup

Jon Diamond Lewis Shield (All England Handicap)

John Timmis and Chris Berwick The Doubles Goblets

Colin Mabey Golf Croquet High Bisquers

12. CLOSE

The Chairman then declared the Meeting closed at 12.50 pm.