

ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS CROQUET CLUB

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON SATURDAY, DECEMBER 10TH 2005 AT 10.30 a.m. in FRANT

Present: Richard CLARK (Chairman), John TIMMIS (Treasurer), Mick BELCHAM (Secretary), Chris BARHAM, Derek CROCOMBE, Jon DIAMOND, John GREENWOOD, Frank GUNSTONE, Derek HEATH, John HOBBS, Barney LEWIS, Colin MABEY, Sue MABEY, Ray MEECH, Roger MORRIS, Pauline MORRIS, Hazel MOSS-DAVIS, Miriam READER, Jane WARD, Selwyn WARD.

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 2004 AGM nor of the July 3rd EGM which were both duly signed by the Chairman.

1. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman highlighted a number of memories/key events of the past year:

- The January Committee Meeting that identified our major strengths (friendliness) and weaknesses (lawns)
- The beginning of work on the lawns
- The transfer of play to the old Bowls Club lawns
- The generous Grants and Donations
- Our assisting Virginia Wade at her birthday celebrations (including our coaching Cliff Richard)
- Our commitment to getting the new lawns right
- Pub Lunches, BBQs and other social events
- Our many interclub Friendly matches

He thanked his Committee for their various contributions and made the point that the club is not successful purely because of the "efforts of the few", it is the "efforts of the many".

He also noted that Derek Heath is retiring from the Committee and thanked him for his efforts especially for organising our League Matches.

2. TREASURER'S REPORT.

The Treasurer reviewed the Accounts for year ending September 30th 2005 and highlighted a number of points concerning comparisons with the previous year.

- While our membership numbers are higher, our level of subscriptions is down due to our varying subscriptions to reflect exceptional circumstances
- We have lower Groundsman and Lawn Maintenance costs due to our closing the lawns early and our not needing a substantial autumn maintenance program
- As a result our Surplus of Income over Expenditure is a healthy £936
- Given the size of the Lawn Project, it has been separately accounted for this year. The key figure to note is that entitled Shortfall. This shows that our Grant and Donation Income this year was able to meet all of the costs of the Lawn Project with the exception of only £1,348 which was met from the existing Lawn Fund.
- We now have a new mower. Hence the approximate £2,000 rise in mower value.
- The Debtor figure is the £2,750 Grant from the Borough Council which had not been received by our year-end (though it has now)
- The Creditors figure is principally the cost of the mower (on our books before year-end but paid for after it) and the second payment (15%) for Lawn Levelling and Seeding which is not due to be paid until next year.

He also emphasised that the Annual Subscription Rate has not changed for many years even though our costs have been rising. This has been possible for two reasons – the increased number of members (and therefore subscriptions) over that period and that we have been fortunate to have had such generous donations from our members. Hence our plea for members

to continue to recognise the importance of their donations. Without them, subscription levels will have to rise and our tax benefits will be reduced.

The acceptance of the Accounts was proposed and seconded and passed unanimously.

3. LAWNS, EQUIPMENT AND FACILITIES.

The Chairman, by way of introduction of Roger Morris, expressed his gratitude for the total commitment and hard work by Roger this year and asked that he accept a small personal gift. He made the point that very few clubs could have achieved what Roger has managed this year and thanked him for his willingness also to look after their maintenance at least for an initial period.

Roger in his review of the Lawn Project noted:

- All had gone very well, both contractors had delivered real value for money (especially Judges, the levelling/seeding contractor, whose “performance was fantastic”) and all work was complete on time and under budget by approximately £450, mainly due to Judges reducing the amount of sand required and not invoicing for it
- The grass continues to grow well, Chris Sturdy (our lawn expert) believes it is in good shape. At the time of completion of works it was level across all 3 lawns within + or – 5mm and since then it would appear that there is negligible settlement (if any) over the entire area
- We hope to begin limited play on the new lawns before mid summer though this was very weather dependent.
- The irrigation system is performing to spec and has been shut down for the winter
- We have been able to purchase an Allen re-badged Ransomes lawnmower for approximately £2,000 below list price. We are currently considering what our equipment priorities are – potentially a scarifier/slitter, a strimmer and rotary mower for the edges and a roller
- To house this securely we are considering the erection of a stand-alone equipment store in the area between the main entrance gate and the west end of the clubhouse. We have already applied for planning permission and established that it will not be subject to Building Regulations/Inspection. Three tenders (from £7,500 to £15,000) have been received and are being evaluated. Should there be a delay in our ability to proceed with this, there are a number of short-term options including the use of our existing steel container behind the Bowls Club. Should we be able to go-ahead with the proposed store then it will be sufficiently large to also house our playing equipment (hoops, balls, trollies etc)
- We have the use of the Bowls Club lawns, certainly until the end of 2006, provided that we maintain them.
- The Borough Council is responsible for the maintenance of the fence surrounding our lawns and clubhouse – including that required to enclose the extension to the east end beyond lawn 3. They proposed to change the existing chain-link type along the north and east boundaries with estate type fencing – a higher version of that erected along the path by the basketball courts. Their contractor’s estimate to do so was approximately £20,000; their budget was £6,000 so they are reconsidering their options
- The extension to the eastern end of the lawns was to allow us to extend lawn 3 by the necessary extra yard to make it full size as well as to provide us with an area that allowed us to dump the old lawn surface. It is effectively a large compost heap but we hope to be able to put it to good use in a year or two.
- On the subject of equipment security (especially given the new lawnmower), Roger emphasised that the new equipment store will be very secure with toughened glass and padlocked doors and the temporary alternative (our steel container) is vandal proof. The mower is currently being stored in his garage.

The Chairman commented on the need for the equipment store and how we should proceed to acquire it:

- The Borough Council owns the steel container that we have used to house our equipment since the club moved to its current location. They have frequently requested for it to be “returned” to them for other uses elsewhere

- Its location means that any equipment eg the mower has to be “trundled” up and down the path before and after use. Two years ago we incurred a costly repair bill to our existing mower, almost certainly damaged during “trundling”. We cannot afford to risk our new mower so a store adjacent to our three new lawns is the most desirable alternative
- At the EGM in the Summer the club agreed that the Committee should proceed with the Lawn Project itself as well as identify alternative equipment storage options. With this in mind, the Committee has:
 - Formally applied for Planning Permission for the proposed store
 - Applied for a Grant of up to £3,000 from the Borough Council
 - Applied for a Grant of up to £8,000 from the Sports Development Fund for Kent County Council
- Neither of these is expected to be granted in full and, potentially, both could be declined. We should know more early in the New Year.

The Chairman therefore asked that the Meeting authorise the Committee to go ahead with the proposed store if it is appropriate to do so. Specifically the following proposal was put to the Meeting and **unanimously approved**:

“This Annual General Meeting notes the projected cost of £7,500 for the provision of an Equipment Store and empowers the Committee to accept the selected tender provided that it is satisfied, after considering the outcome of current Grant Applications and available funds and commitments, that it is prudent to proceed”

4. MARKETING AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

Jon Diamond reviewed this year’s events and successes

- The club’s website is being modified to improve ease and speed of access. It’s main success has been to present the image of an active and vibrant club and can be credited with providing the necessary visibility to enable Virginia Wade to contact us for (paid) coaching assistance at her birthday party and BBC Radio Kent to request a lengthy radio interview with Aaron Westerby (and supporting cast!) at the Club. It has been the “way in” for a number of potential new members as well as for external groups wishing to play Croquet as part of an event/party (also paid). Local newspapers have also used it both to locate us and for background information for 4 significant articles. Jon requested all members to feed him news etc that he can use to keep the website up-to-date and “active”
- Leaflets distributed to houses close to the club did not result in any new interest.
- Next year is the 400th Anniversary of the “discovery” of Tunbridge Wells and the Council etc are organising appropriate celebrations. As a club we are probably going to organise our first Open Golf Croquet Weekend and invite any celebrities that members may know. We are attempting to establish if there is any real opportunity to issue an invitation to our twin town’s (Wiesbaden’s) “Croquet Club” to visit us.
- Next year we will do more to make the necessary contacts and encourage more external group parties and corporate events such as that with BT this year

Roger Morris congratulated Jon on the quality of the website and his efforts to keep it up to date and interesting. He also suggested that the Hotel du Vin may be interested in using Croquet as an adjunct to some of the events they organise for their guests. Maybe other hotels too?

Jon listed the various social events run this year – Tea at 3 (Hospice), Lawn Opening Day, BBQs, a sausage and mash lunch, several pub lunches etc. He would like member suggestions for next year – how about organised walks for example.

5. TOURNAMENTS AND COMPETITIONS

The Secretary reviewed the past year’s programme:

- We held nine internal competitions this year. These were broadly as per last year except that all Block and other Final matches were played on Finals Day. This would appear to have been a successful and enjoyable end to the competitive season.

- We held only one Open Tournament (a High Bisquers) this year as we only had a short season and our two main Open Events are typically scheduled for September ie after the lawns were closed this year.
- Regarding our interclub matches, our U League performance (9th out of 14) was completely over-shadowed by that of our B and Golf Leagues – 2nd equal out of 19 in the B League and 3rd out of 17 in the Golf League. We also entered the SECF Team Doubles weekend but managed to lose more games than we won!
- At an individual level, Aaron Westerby was in the last 8 of the World Championships in Cheltenham this year. Well done from all of us, Aaron.

Three points were raised for Committee consideration:

- Should the deadlines for initial block games be earlier so that there is less time pressure towards the end of the playing season?
- Should we formalise who-calls-who to arrange games so that someone takes responsibility for each scheduled match?
- Could handicapping be more rigorous? (John Hobbs committed to documenting and publicising a clear description of our handicapping approach and what member responsibilities are)

6. MEMBERSHIP, SUPPORT AND SUBSCRIPTIONS

We currently have 53 members including 3 Honorary. We have 3 resignations at the end of this year:

- Clive Horton.. The Meeting asked that a letter of appreciation be written to Clive for his 12 years in the role of Treasurer of the Club.
- Brian and Doreen Hough who are moving to Bexhill. They have kindly donated their mallets to the Club

We also have 2 members (Brian and Janice Ware) who are moving to East Dean, Sussex but would like to keep their membership but “on a reduced basis” (to be discussed)

Regarding Support and Subscriptions, the Secretary reminded the Meeting of the Club’s policy to fund basic club maintenance through the Annual Subscriptions where possible 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 is required for development projects, the additional burden that this places upon individual members is 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

This year the additional tax benefit to the Club has been nearly £2,000.

The Treasurer noted that while, in the past, the cost of basic club maintenance has not exceeded the level of Annual Subscriptions, this is unlikely to continue given our increased lawn maintenance costs. Our Annual Subscription of £100 has not been raised to reflect inflation for 11 years. He asked all members that, when registering for membership next year, that they should recognise this fact when considering any donation that they might wish to make.

The Committee proposed the following Annual Subscription rates for 2006:

- Full Membership:
 - First Year: £ 75
 - Thereafter: £100
- Student Membership: £ 35

In order to cater for exceptional or unforeseen circumstances, these rates may be varied by the Club’s Officers when deemed appropriate.

The Committee should consider encouraging 2nd Club Membership for members of other Clubs, particularly in Kent and Sussex. This will require some “policing” to ensure that it is not abused. The Secretary will issue the initial invitations via each club’s Secretary. While these members

will fall in the category of Full Members (per the Club's Constitution) their Annual Subscription will be £35

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 2006

These proposed Subscription and Green Fee rates for 2006 were agreed unanimously.

7. ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

The Chairman noted that Derek Heath is retiring from the Committee this year and again thanked him for his 4 years of support. All other members of the Committee (including the 3 Officers) are standing for re-election. Their re-election was unanimously agreed.

Two further members have offered themselves for election to the Committee to fill the (now) two vacancies – Frank Gunstone and Selwyn Ward. Each was proposed, seconded and unanimously appointed to the Committee.

The Committee then for 2006 is as follows:

Chairman	Richard Clark
Treasurer	John Timmis
Secretary	Mick Belcham
Committee	Jon Diamond , Frank Gunstone, John Hobbs, Colin Mabey, Roger Morris and Selwyn Ward

8. TRUSTEES AND LEASE

Our Constitution requires that we (re)elect our Trustees at each AGM. The Secretary and Treasurer are already Trustees and put themselves forward for re-election. The Chairman put himself forward as Trustee for election to replace John Hobbs (as ex-Chairman). The Meeting agreed unanimously and the three Honorary Officers are therefore the Club's Trustees for 2006.

The wording of the new Lease is currently being reviewed by the Borough Council's Solicitors. The Heads of Agreement are already agreed.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS.

A suggestion: we should investigate the possibility of using Estate Agents to advertise the existence of Croquet in the town as they do Golf, Tennis etc in their description of local amenities for house buyers

10. PRESENTATION OF PRIZES

The Chairman presented Hazel Moss-Davis with a memento of her becoming an Honorary Member. He then asked her to present the following prizes:

Jolyon Creasey	Spa Salver
Chris Barham	Calverley Cup
Roger Morris	Association Ladder
	Golf Croquet Rose Bowl
Pamela Clark	Golf Croquet High Bisquers
John Hunt	Howell Cup for High Bisquers
Richard Clark	Lustau Sherry Cup
	Lewis Shield (All England Handicap)
John Hunt and Mick Belcham	The Doubles Goblets

11. CLOSE

The Chairman then declared the Meeting closed.