



newsletter

Ben Ashwell wins the All England Handicap

Ben Ashwell, whose triumph in the All England area final was described in the last issue, went to the national final at Roehampton on 15/16 September and completed a memorable year by carrying off the Trevor Williams Cup and New Zealand Tray. Ben joins previous Wrest Park winners Mike Wilson (1980) and Robert England (1986).



Ben, with runner-up Martin McKay, receives the cup.
Photo by Rod Ashwell.

The event was managed by Douglas Gurney, who used a 'quality of wins' (i.e. who you'd beaten) rating for the lesser places, and the 1-2-3 was:

- 1st **Ben Ashwell (Wrest Park)** 5 wins from 6
- 2nd Martin McKay (Chelmsford) 5/6
- 3rd Victor Forrington (Cheltenham) 4/6

Ben won the game between himself and Martin, and Victor, one of several on four wins, was the only player to beat Ben.

The All England was initiated in 1923 through the energy and enthusiasm of Col. H.J.Whittle (an early CA reformer), based on the ideas of G.C.Bromthwaite and the Rev W.J.Limmer Sheppard (two North country players) to encourage croquet in places outside London and the Home Counties. It was initially and colloquially known as 'The Grand National' and remains the biggest handicap tournament in terms of entry.

An added bonus was that Ben's impeccable timing allowed us to have the trophies on display as part of the club's 40th anniversary celebrations. We should also thank Douglas Gurney's wife, a jeweller, who took one

look at the state of the New Zealand Tray and promptly took it away to be cleaned in time for the presentation.

Match results

Beds & Herts League vs Meldreth (home)
9 September

Lost 2-3

Wrest Park	H'cap	Meldreth	H'cap	WP score
David Woolley	7	Robert Skeen	10	+3T
John Martin	20	Alec Osborne	12	
David Parsons	10	Angus Bell	12	-17
David Woolley	7	Angus Bell	12	-22
David Parsons	10	Robert Skeen	10	-12
John Martin	20	Alec Osborne	12	+7T

David Parsons reports: Prior to this match, neither club had won a league match this season, so it was a contest for last place. Due to illness, Meldreth could only field a team of 3, so we agreed a format of 1 doubles and 4 singles. Unfortunately, both Davids seemed unable to shoot straight, while their opponents in the singles had no such problems. Honour was saved by John Martin, who had his first win in competitive singles play, so now has to try to locate his handicap card.

The league was won by St Albans (by virtue of beating Enfield, with whom they had finished level on points), who go into the playoff for the winners of all the leagues within the East Anglian Federation. The winners of the Federation playoffs form the entry for next year's Secretary's Shield competition.

	P	W	D	L	Pts
St Albans	6	4	1	1	9
Enfield	6	4	1	1	9
Colworth	6	3	2	1	8
Letchworth	5	3	0	2	6
Watford	5	2	0	3	4
Meldreth	4	1	0	3	2
Wrest Park	6	0	0	6	0

At the time of writing Meldreth have yet to play Watford and Letchworth. Watford have already distinguished themselves elsewhere by winning the Longman Cup.

Remembering that "it's the taking part that counts", now is the time to thank all those who answered their captain's call and turned out for the league team during the season. Things can only get better.

	Doubles			Singles		
	P	W	L	P	W	L
Ben Ashwell	4	2	2	4	1	3
John Martin	3	2	1	3	1	2
David Woolley	1	1	0	3	0	3
George Collin	2	0	2	2	1	1
John Bevington	4	0	4	0	0	0
Gordon Sampson	2	0	2	2	0	2
Rod Ashwell	1	1	0	1	0	1
David Parsons	0	0	0	2	0	2
Peter Newman	1	0	1	1	0	1
Elaine Newman	1	0	1	1	0	1
Peter Smith	0	0	0	1	0	1
Ben Marchant	1	0	1	0	0	0

Mary Rose semi-final vs Bristol (away)

9 September

Won 5-2

Wrest Park	H'cap	Bristol	H'cap	WP score
Eric Audsley	1½	Frances Ransom	2½	+25
John Wheeler	1½	George Green	3½	
John Bevington	1½	Marian Hilton	4	pegged down
George Collin	2	Bob Scott	4	+20
Eric Audsley	1½	George Green	3½	+24
John Wheeler	1½	Frances Ransom	2½	+16
John Bevington	1½	Bob Scott	4	unfinished
George Collin	2	Marian Hilton	4	+23

Rod's having got his handicap down to ½ meant that he was no longer eligible, as the minimum handicap for the Mary Rose is 1. Eric stepped in and he and John made short work of the doubles. John B stuck in hoop 1, whereupon Marian went round to 4-back and the game then got stuck, so it was pegged down when lunch was taken after George's win. Marian started her next game with a perfect corner cannon to get a ball to hoop 1 from corner 4 but ran out of steam, and after Eric and John W had completed their games John B's game with Bob, which had acquired the texture of suet pudding, was thankfully abandoned. John was left feeling like the reader of the old wartime cartoon, who was asked: "Is your journey really necessary?"

Mary Rose final vs Bowdon (at Cheltenham)

29 Sept

Lost 3-4

Wrest Park	H'cap	Bowdon	H'cap	WP score
John Wheeler	1½	Mike Sandler	1	+1
John Bevington	1½	Ken Cooper	1½	
George Collin	2	David Walters	1½	+4
Bryan Harral	5	Andrew Keeble	3	-18
John Wheeler	1½	Mike Sandler	1	-6
John Bevington	1½	Ken Cooper	1½	-2
George Collin	2	Andrew Keeble	1½	+5
Bryan Harral	5	David Walters	3	-16

Another change to the team was required as Eric was attending a conference in Rumania, so old campaigner Bryan Harral kindly stepped in, having first had to renew his CA membership. Bryan is one of the Wrest Park veterans, having won tournaments in the late 70s and been a member of the Bedfordshire Inter Counties team, but it was hard to have to make your first appearance in the final, on unfamiliar lawns and (more importantly) playing with Barlow GT balls instead of our usual Jaques Eclipse.

To our surprise we went into lunch 2-1 ahead. George came good, and after Mike missed the pegout John W hit in and John B finished for the narrowest of wins. In the afternoon singles George produced one of his special moments when, having had one ball pegged out and with the opponent laid up in corner 4 with a rush to 4 -back, he ran penultimate hard from a distance. The ball negotiated the peg and continued through rover, stopping just clear of the hoop. George called for a referee, and, from an awkward position, shot and hit. This left the match tied at 3-3, and all depending on John B's game with Ken.

John seemed to have things under control when he over-rolled on the approach to rover, and, being prevented by hoop 1 from getting back close to partner, lost all powers of logical thought in the frustration of the moment and tried to go for a wired but runnable position. Ken hit the half-ball on offer and went to the peg, pegging John out, and when the long lift was missed (everyone apparently silently screaming for the short shot) Ken did an immaculate stop shot approach from corner 4 to make 3-back and went round to win. *Sic transit Maria Rosa.*

Some of us who had stayed overnight returned to the club the next day to watch the Inter Club final, which rather put our own efforts into perspective. Cheltenham, in the final for the third consecutive year, were playing Surbiton. In the doubles the Surbiton pair of Stephen Mulliner and world champion Reg Bamford won +26 with a Bamford triple peel in the eighth turn. Mulliner then won his singles +26 with a triple of his own, while at the same time and on the same lawn Bamford completed an immaculate sextuple peel to win by the same score. This was concluded with a rover peel where the peeled ball was only sent through by a small amount, the other ball deliberately being left short. Reg then played a jump shot, the ball erupting from the ground like a low trajectory shell to sail clean through to the south boundary where another ball was waiting. Neither of their opponents took croquet. As Jeremy Dyer had beaten Don Gaunt +23 with yet another triple peel the match was over in a mere two hours.

Handicap tournament

14-16 September

Report by Ian Mantle (Letchworth)

Sixteen players met on Friday 14th September in the magnificent Wrest Park Gardens for the three day September Tournament. This despite a forecast promising a cold wind and blustery showers. In the event, the weather was kind; although there was a fresh wind from the North, there was a lot of sun and no rain during play, although George Collin did get wet while mowing the lawns on Friday evening.

The Tournament was run as an Egyptian, with no time limits on any of the games before the last afternoon. Despite this, a total of 55 games were played during the weekend. Tom Anderson showed how much he enjoys the game. Not content with five and a half hours for his first match on Friday, his first on Saturday only finished when his opponent pegged out at five to four in the afternoon. This was after a short interruption while a referee had to adjudicate on the correct position for a clip found in a pocket some time after the last time that ball had been played. Despite these efforts, he still managed to finish six games by Sunday evening

(though, with twilight looming, a time limit was imposed on the last one).

Perhaps the most memorable shot was by Don Cornelius. After Don had failed to peg out one of his balls, his opponent, John Bevington was making steady progress until he jammed his backward ball in Rover. Don then proceeded to peel him with a shot from Corner 3, and finish the game.

The overall winner of the Tournament was Dennis Graham, who won all six of his games, including a nail-biting last one against John Bee; Dennis ran out the winner, plus two on time. George Collin was runner-up. John Bee did have the satisfaction of achieving his bronze award during the Tournament.

The tournament was managed with unfailing good humour by Cliff Jones, helped by various members of his family. As well as thanks from all those competing, he also received the traditional Wrest Park award of the Golden Bananas, as the winner of the fewest games. Wrest Park provided their usual excellent hospitality, and made all feel welcome. All the comments heard afterwards were of how enjoyable it had been, and how much all were looking forward to coming back next season.

All England Golf Croquet Final 22/23 September

In contrast to the goings-on in the Old Dairy, the catering arrangements for this event were rather more makeshift. Manager Brian Judson, in spite of having reminded players to bring their own lunch on Saturday, found several had come without and was forced into going to the village shop and buying up a quantity of sandwiches and a loaf of bread and pieces of cheese. On the following day we had promised to go to Tesco in Flitwick to buy sandwiches for anyone who wanted them, but when John Bevington got there the shelves were empty, so he had to buy the necessary bits and make them up in the pavilion.

The event seemed to go off very well, even though there had been some last-minute problems with players who didn't appear to have had their handicaps established until the last minute. Styles of play varied between the traditional close-quarters manoeuvring and the more modern aggressive shoot-out in which balls are knocked out of the way from almost any distance.

The winner was Marcus Evans from Nailsea, who beat John Moore from Tyneside in the deciding match on Sunday morning. One hopes that the CA, if they want to encourage this event, can come up with a more substantial trophy in the future.

After sending Brian some photos for his report I received a reply in which he said: *"May I take this opportunity to thank you and other members of your club for all the background work you did - getting the lawns ready, setting the hoops, providing drinks and light refreshment throughout the weekend. It was very much appreciated by all of us. This plus the lovely setting and the fine weather contributed to a really enjoyable weekend and many players commented to this effect."*

Solid geometry - the 14 point polyhedron

A chance discussion between Rod Ashwell and George Collin on suitable trophies for a 14 point tournament led to George's turning up to the S&G with a collection of solid shapes and wire frames with 14 vertices; Rod arriving later with more information culled from the Internet. The basic model is a cube with a pyramid on each face, the two main contenders being the rhombic dodecahedron and the tetrakis hexahedron (Archimedean duals, for those who know about these things). More paper constructions, proofs and a hardwood model of the rhombic dodecahedron appeared in the pavilion during the scarifying day on October 13.

There are also, of course, 18, 22 and 26 point versions of the game.....

Things to come

Every year the CA send out a list of CA events which clubs can bid to host. The new system has clubs bidding this year for events in 2003 and 2004. The information invariably arrives just after our committee meeting and the answers are typically required before the next meeting, so decisions sometimes have to be taken without a full discussion.

There are only a few events that we can realistically hope to stage - we were going to put in for the Peel Memorials, a handicap competition, in 2004, but this is now a four-day event and would place unrealistic demands on our already hard-pressed catering crew. I have therefore taken it upon myself to put in a bid for the Home Internationals in 2004, which take place over a single weekend in the middle of June. All we can do now is wait to see if our bid is successful.

We will be hosting the Selector's Weekend next year, and the Eastern Championships in 2003.

Groundsmanship

Perfect weather on Saturday 13 October saw a full day's work in which the lawns had the dew swept off with a tarpaulin dragged behind the mower, all six lawns scarified N-S, the leavings swept up with the leaf sweeper, the lawns mown and the autumn fertiliser applied. This followed an earlier diagonal scarification the week before. Many thanks to all who helped. Vertidrainage by contractors will take place on the 19th, and we will shred and spread the top dressing on the 27/28th - this is labour intensive, so please come and help if you possibly can.

Wrest Park Croquet Club's 40th anniversary lunch - 22 Sept

*"Forty years on, when afar and asunder
Parted are those who are singing today
When you look back and forgetfully wonder
What you were like in your work and your play...."*

The words of the Harrow school song are appropriate for a day when those who had been afar returned to meet old friends and share memories, occasionally reminding others (who had been "forgetfully wondering")

just what their play had been like. The food was plentiful and good, the weather was glorious and, by kind permission of the Treasurer, the drinks were free.



"...and then I..." Marie Williams and Tim Brewer listen to the new honorary member. Pandora Wheeler has heard this one before.

Chairman Tim Brewer greeted the 60-odd guests with a short welcome before handing over to John Wheeler, who described the club's origins and a few landmarks in its history (including the origin of that elusive measurement, the "1/2 Rees"), and introduced some distinguished visitors. Great Britain captain David Openshaw spoke on behalf of the guests, recalling early tournaments and après-croquet diversions, and Tim announced the awarding of honorary membership to John Wheeler, which was met with warm applause, the production of handkerchiefs and calls for more beer. Everyone then fell on the buffet, taking over the restaurant and the tables on the lawn outside.



Jon Watson, Howard Bottomley and Phil Cordingley



Alfresco association: Peter Berry (in whites), Judy, Enid Bottomley, George Collin and Ben Ashwell, with Lionel Tibble at the far table.

The Senior Dining Room had been taken over for an illustrated exhibition describing the history of the club; also on show were the club trophies, the Beddow Cup and All England Handicap trophies and a variety of tournament prizes.



1961-2001 - the major events and tournament winners, with photos of teams, building construction and historic floods



Harry Green's hand-made shields and bowls with more recent tournament prizes, including the inevitable bananas.

Also on display were John Wheeler's photo albums and scrapbooks full of croquet and Wrest Park memorabilia. These proved very popular, occasionally inducing spontaneous laughter as guests came across images of themselves and their acquaintances: "Who's that? No, it

can't be.... Hasn't he/she.... You must remember that time when he/she...."



Paul Hands, inventor of the Egyptian tournament format, David Openshaw and World Championship manager Richard Hilditch

After lunch those in need of a little light exercise wandered down to the lawns to watch the All England Golf Croquet Handicap finals, while others reached for another coffee and settled down to chat and solve the problems of the croquet world.



Mark Firth, Judy Anderson, Marie and Hugh Williams, Julie Ashwell and Howard

Eventually it was time to take down the exhibition, rearrange the furniture and reflect on a day which, given some of the changes of plan and mild panics along the way, turned out better than any of us could have expected. Many thanks to everyone for all their hard work. It's often the little details that make the difference, such as Eric's finding blue velvet table coverings to set off the cups. Here's to the 50th!



Pioneers! O Pioneers!: Dr. John Lake, who provided the club's first set of equipment, talking to Ben Mouldsley and Vic Rees.

Club Competitions

**Steel Cup
(Advanced)**

Winner: Rod Ashwell
Runner-up: Jon Watson

**Archer Cup
(Handicap)**

Winner: Howard Bottomley
Runner-up: David Parsons

**Ashwell Cup
(All England h'cap)**

Winner: Ben Ashwell
Runners-up: Eric Audsley
and John Bevington

**De Grey Plate
(14 pt h'cap)**

Winner: Ben Marchant
Runner-up: Gordon Sampson

The finals day evaded us yet again, with the Archer final taking place on Sunday 16 September as the tournament drew to a close, Howard winning the trophy for the first time. Rod won the Steel a week later, going round on a 3-ball break after having pegged Jon out when the triple broke down. New member Ben Marchant won the De Grey Plate. The two runners-up in the Ashwell Cup are the players who lost to Ben in the two semi-finals. We apologise for having grabbed all the trophies from the holders for the anniversary display, but we will have them all polished up ready for the Annual Dinner.

2001 Annual Dinner

The annual dinner will be at the Leaside Hotel, Villa Road, Luton on Friday November 23rd, 7.30 for 8pm. To get to the hotel, drive down Villa Road (see map) and continue down the private road which leads to the hotel car park. Please ring Rod Ashwell (01 582 504536) if you wish to attend the dinner, and it would be appreciated if you could let him know your preferences for starter and main course from the attached menu. Don't leave it too late, as we are limited to a maximum of 30 places.

2001 Christmas Cracker

This seasonal fun tournament is scheduled for Sunday 16th December. Four one-hour games starting at 9.30 sharp, with a break for mince pies and liquid refreshment, followed by a meal at about 2pm. In a break with tradition we are going to self-cater in the pavilion. Open to **all** members, the format will cater for players at all levels, so if you are interested in playing, cooking, drinking or all three, please contact the

manager, Rod Ashwell (01582 504536) before the middle of November.

Committee Meeting 6 September

- **Event catering:** As we do not organise formal catering for CA events and other matches staged at Wrest Park, there are occasions when players (and /or managers cast in the temporary role of caterers) visit the Silsoe village shop and buy up quantities of sandwiches. The shop have asked us if we could forewarn them so they can allow for extra demand.

This might seem ridiculous but does show up the gap in our provisions for these events. Wrest Park are hosting the Selector's Weekend next year. Is it not possible to cater for this and other events in the same way as for our own tournaments?

- **Beds & Herts League:** George Collin requested that all club members volunteer to play in the League at least once next year.
- **Gate lock:** Apparently the lock has been left open recently on a couple of occasions. There is nothing to suggest that any club member failed to rescramble the combination, but please remember to do so every time it is used. While the old lock was undoubtedly hard to manipulate, the new one is simplicity itself. *(Note: while the new lock was easy to operate it was also possible to inadvertently change the combination by mistake, so the old one is now back in action).*
- **Craft Fair:** In view of the comments made about the lack of mallets and the need to refurbish some of them, as well as the need for some child-sized mallets, it was decided to ask members with suitable expertise to help.
- **Trophies:** George suggested that the club purchase a trophy to be competed for annually at the July tournament. Anyone with a suitable cup which could be donated or sold to the club for this purpose should contact Eric Audsley.
- **All England Area Final:** Rod Ashwell passed on the thanks from all the players who had participated in the event.
- **Golf croquet:** Irene Davis put in a request for a club golf croquet competition for next year
- **Resignations:** Charles and Grace Howell have written to resign from the club on the occasion of their moving to Scotland, thanking us for the welcoming social occasions and regretting that, due to Charles' hip operation, they were unable to play more often. We wish them well.
- **AOB:** The special extra item proposed for announcement at the 40th anniversary was agreed.
- **Next meeting:** No more meetings planned for this year, but if anyone has suggestions to make regarding any aspect of the club and its activities please let me know at any time - don't wait for the AGM. Things to think about: attracting and retaining new members, coaching and club events for beginners and higher handicappers, improvements to facilities, and so on.

While the recent 40th anniversary party gave us an opportunity to look back on the story so far, we should be considering what we need to do to secure the club's future for the next forty years and more.

John Bevington

19 October 2001