



LEIGHTON-LINSLADE CROQUET CLUB

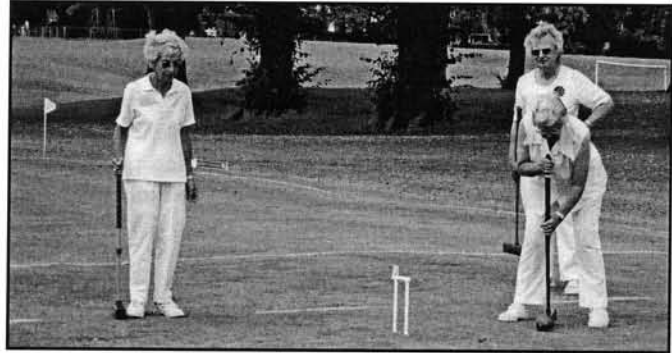
Founded 2000

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“CROQUET IS FOR FUN”



Welcome to the September Newsletter under the Editorship of Richard Keighley and John Cundell.

2004 diary

- Sept 24 Friendly match v Watford at Cassiobury Park
- Sept 25/26 Golf Croquet All England Handicap Final at Colchester
- Sept 30 End of Season, or is it? Watch Club Notice Board!
- Nov 19 AGM/Party at Northall Village Hall

“Croquet is for FUN”

Readers of these columns may be forgiven for thinking that our Club exists mainly to play matches against other clubs and to give more experienced members an opportunity to enter tournaments and competitions.

Your Committee does not agree with this view. As a priority, it sets out to provide an opportunity for ALL members to play croquet for fun in the regular Club sessions and to obtain full value for their annual subscriptions. These sessions have been well attended all season and Len Buckingham has commented that “there is a real buzz about them”. Handicap singles on Tuesday afternoons have become very popular since their introduction at the beginning of August.

The Committee also believes that “fun only” players will enjoy golf croquet even more if they receive proper coaching, as well as advice from the better players in the Club. As their standard of play improves, the confidence of new members grows and they are more enthusiastic about

taking part in friendly matches and Grass Roots type events without being under any pressure to do so.

But what matters is what you, the members, think. Has your Committee got the balance right? Is there anything you are unhappy about or any fresh initiative that you would like the Committee to take?

COME and HAVE YOUR SAY at the AGM at NORTHALL VILLAGE HALL on FRIDAY 19th NOVEMBER 2004 at 7.30pm. We look forward to seeing you there.

Match Reports - Friendlies Stony Stratford - Home - 28th July

On a fine day on newly mown lawns at Pages Park, our Club team tied this match at 8 games all but was deemed to have won it by scoring a total of 90 hoops to Stony's 88. Eve Buckingham and Sally Clay won all their games. Len Buckingham and Una Pengelly won all but one and the other pairs were John Cundell and Val Jeffers and Margaret Brown and Judith Cundell.

Val's efforts as Chief Caterer were also much appreciated as was the assistance to her provided by Diana Phelps, Edna Hickman, Audrey Burton and Norma Morris. Richard Keighley was Match organiser.

Winslow - Away - 5th August “Bunfight at the OK Corral”

Faces fell as our team arrived at Winslow for the return friendly. The 'lawn' was about half the size as one of ours



Stony Stratford at Home - top left: most of both teams prior to the match; top right: Eve Buckingham lines up a shot watched by partner Sally Clay and one of Stony Stratford's players.

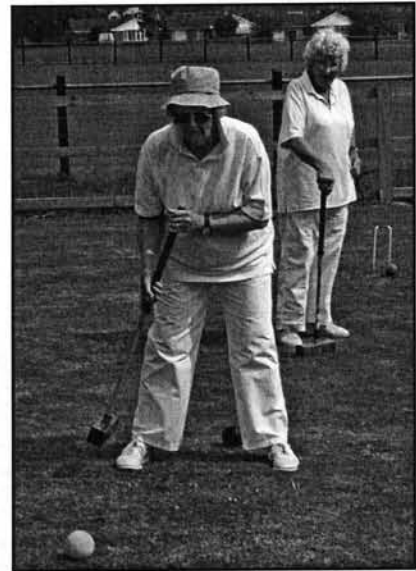
Left: Judith Cundell prepares to play an in-off shot, watched by her partner Margaret Brown - and Neville and John from Stony Stratford.

Right: Len Buckingham lines up - his technique watched closely by 90+ Sarah from Stony Stratford. (That's her age, not her handicap!)





At left is Winslow's three - yes, three - lawns on a total size approximately half that of one of our lawns! And there is also the boundary fence which reduces the playing area by another metre all the way around. So don't complain about a small overlap!



At right: Val Jeffers plays a shot at Winslow, watched by her partner Diana Phelps.

Below: Watford Friendly pics by John Fogg.

and surrounded by a high picket fence. It then transpired that this tiny lawn was to be further sub-divided into 3 for the match. Undeterred, the pairing of Diana Phelps and Val Jeffers won 4 out of their 5 games, and Margaret Brown and Richard Keighley 3 out of 5 to give our Club a 7-3 win. Thanks are due to Sally Clay for being our Reserve and Scorer, to the Cundells for coming to support our team and to our hosts for the warmth of their welcome and slap up tea. (Thanks to Margaret Brown for helping compile this report.)

Watford - Home - 10th September "Friendly success for croquet pairs"

Pages Park was the venue for the first ever friendly fixture against a team from Watford Croquet Club on 10th September. Early morning rain ceased as the match was starting and fine weather prevailed long enough for our Club to complete a victory by 13 games to 3.

Each team comprised 4 pairs of players with each pair playing all 4 pairs of the opposition team. Leading the way was the pairing of Erica Fogg and Richard Keighley, who won all 4 of their games. The other 3 pairs were husband and wife combinations, namely George and Margaret Lawson, Peter and Irene Stevens and John and Judith Cundell and they all won 3 games each. It did not go unnoticed that all these 3 pairs were having a crafty practice for the Club Doubles tournament the following weekend.

However, the main feature of the day was the convivial atmosphere in which the match was played. Good-natured banter and a little gentle barracking was definitely the order of the day! Members now look forward to the return fixture at Watford on 24th September, when a completely different team will represent our Club.

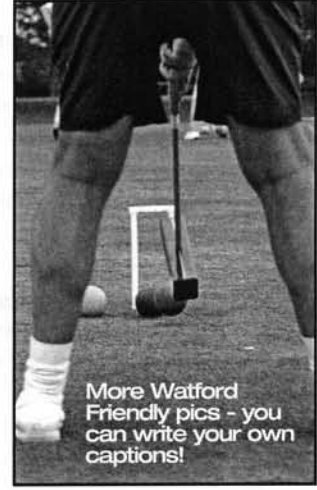
Grass Roots - "Rooted out"

On 8th August, John Cundell and Richard Keighley joined 14 other players from clubs as far apart as Hunstanton, Reigate Priory, Bristol, Warwick, Leamington Spa and Watford for the Regional Final. The format was as before but the organiser restricted the doubles rounds to 5 as the heat was oppressive. Neither John nor Richard struck top form and neither progressed to the singles games or to the National Final.

Grass Roots 2005

As reported in the July Newsletter, the Club Committee would like to build on the success of the club competition





by extending the entry next year from 8 to 16, perhaps even more. We are glad to report there is support from members for this initiative. Each person taking part would be asked to pay a fee of £2.50 with the Club making up any shortfall between the amount collected and the Group entry fee of £40. Grass Roots is a competition for beginners and high handicap players and it provides valuable experience for all taking part.

Ickworth - 5th September

Una and Judith Pengelly and Val Jeffers represented the Club at the annual golf croquet singles tournament at Ickworth House, near Bury St Edmunds. It was organised by the East Anglian Croquet Federation on behalf of the National Trust.

It was a gloriously sunny Sunday in a magnificent setting. Our players were 3 of 24 competitors from 9 different clubs in the region. Each player had to play every other player in her block of 6 and handicaps were used. Judith was most successful finishing as runner up in her block and she was pleased to have won her game against the eventual block winner. Una and Val were not so fortunate but still very much enjoyed their day out. However, the unsung heroine of the day was Diana Phelps whose painful wrist had prevented her from playing. She scored continuously throughout and earned the gratitude of the organisers.

Annual Garden Party at the Phelps residence

Fingers were crossed when the day dawned with a distinctly threatening sky and a fresh breeze. It was Friday 13th August after all! The gazebo was pegged down with care and only plastic tables and chairs were put out in advance.

However, it was still bright and dry at 3pm as Diana Phelps welcomed the first guests and a hotly contested game of jenga began between the ladies and the outnumbered gentlemen. It was declared a tie as the tower of wooden bricks was about to topple over. A game of 'cricket' followed with the gents running out easy winners.

It was then time for a delicious and generous tea, which everybody enjoyed out of doors. Those with any energy left played boules under the trees. A good time was had by all and very many thanks must go to Diana and Jim for their kind hospitality and to the many contributors of tasty food for the occasion.

The Golf Croquet All England Handicap

As we go to press, Richard Keighley is nervously awaiting

his appearance in the Final to be played at Colchester over the weekend of 25/26th September. Here's his account of his day out at Newport in Essex for the Eastern Area Final on 14th August.

"There were 10 of us in the Area Final; 6 from Colchester, 1 each from Letchworth, Newport and Watford plus yours truly. My handicap was +3.

We were split into 2 blocks of 5. The winner and runner up in each block would go through to the Final at Colchester.

I was in a block with players whose handicaps varied from -1 to +6. By lunchtime (always a favourite pastime of mine!), I had beaten players with handicaps of +5 and +6 but lost to the +1. He played an outrageous jump shot, which completely deflated me.

After lunch, I knew that I had to beat the -1 handicapper to stand any chance of making progress. It transpired that he had won the whole tournament 2 years ago. The best thing was that he was giving me 4 strokes. It was nip and tuck throughout, but fortunately I had saved a bisque for the 13th hoop which proved decisive.

The organiser announced that 3 of us in my block had won 3 of our 4 games. We had also each won one and lost one in our games against each other. However, on hoop countback, I had missed out. I then beat the player who came 3rd in the other block and I was allocated 5th place overall. I thought that was that and I drove home pleased that I had done myself justice.

PS. Imagine my surprise when a few days later I received a telephone call to say that I had made it to the Final after all!"

Some further thoughts from Richard.

"I go to the Final with low expectations but a determination to give a good account of myself. I hope that my experience will encourage other members to enter the competition in future years. I take the view that there is very little difference in the standard of play between a number of our more experienced members. We all have good days and bad days. In a competition like this, the handicap system does work to level the playing field."

Other News Items Croquet Marathon

Irene Davis writes:

"Thanks to the help of your members, we raised £1206 which we have shared equally between Macmillan Cancer Care and Keech Cottage. Both charities are very grateful to those who played and to those who sponsored them."

East Anglian Golf Croquet League - South Section

The League organiser has informed us that we failed to win our Section by a whisker. Burnham on Crouch had an identical record of 2 wins and one defeat but pipped us because one of their wins was against us. They now play Bury St Edmunds, the winner of the North Section, in the Final play off.

Your Club Committee has considered our successful involvement in the League and given mainly positive feedback to the organiser at the end of this trial year.

Welcome, Best Wishes , and a Lift would help

A warm welcome to new members Jennifer Armstrong, Sheila Guest and Tony Wells. And best wishes and a speedy recovery to Jean Floyd. Also we welcome back Joan Slow to Pages Park - Joan has no way of getting to the Park and an occasional lift from any member would be very welcome. Her telephone number is 01525 373779.

Club Badges

Most of you will have seen the proposed design for the club badge which has been displayed in the Clubroom for some months. The 'straw poll' which accompanied the designs resulted in the 3 inch diameter design (exact sized image below) with the light green background coming out as the most popular. Also displayed was a sample from the firm showing their excellent standard. They have produced badges for many other organisations,



and a number of other croquet clubs. We were put on to them by Stony Stratford, whose badge we had admired.

We are placing an initial order for 50 off and the cost per badge to members is expected to be around £3.50 each. Delivery is 4 weeks so hopefully we will have supplies at the AGM on 19th November.

Your Committee met on 16th September and amongst other things, decided:

1. To offer to host a Coaching Course to be run by the Croquet Association at Pages Park on a Saturday early next season.
2. To construct a permanent step at the entrance to the Pavilion clubhouse. (It is proposed that it should extend the full width of the entrance and be 24 inches wide and 9 inches deep.)
3. To make better provision for visiting teams by buying a set of mugs, bars of soap and plenty of toilet paper! Also members will be asked to provide their own cups and

mugs next season - there will be storage and washing-up facilities provided.

4. To consult with the Groundsman about playing on into October, weather permitting, and to liaise with him about a starting date for next season. Keep an eye on the noticeboard for possible extension of playing time.

5. Any outstanding claims for financial reimbursement for expense must be lodged with the Treasurer before 17th October.

Catering contacts!

All members should note that Eve Buckingham is the Club Quartermaster, and would they please contact her on 01525 221079 when tea, coffee, milk pots and other consumable items in general use in the clubhouse are running low - also paper plates, serviettes, etc. Please note no more cups of milk will be provided until 2005 season.

Val Jeffers is Catering Officer together with a team of six forming the catering committee, and organises refreshments etc., for visitors and functions. She is on 01296 688543.

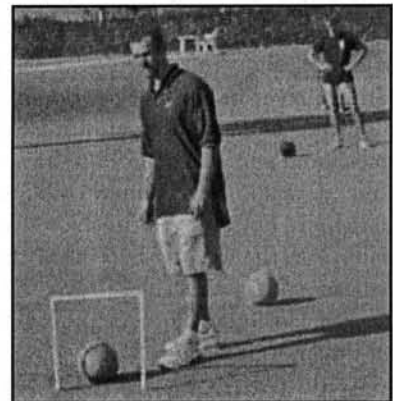
AUNTIE PEGGY - You write to Golf Croquet's agony aunt.

Dear Auntie Peggy I admit I lose my temper easily. When I miss an easy hoop, I kick the balls away much to the annoyance of my partner and our opponents. I have tried everything but I can't stop myself. Help, please!

Auntie's advice: "It's simple. You are playing the wrong game. Try TOEQUET! Instead of croquet balls, you use footballs with oversized hoops to match. You kick the balls rather than strike them with a mallet. Surprise, surprise ... Toequet is big in the USA!"

Toequet is a new game now being played by some youth groups in South Florida. Soccer balls are used with oversized hoops made from pvc.

Right: Chris Rainwater, Sports Director at Palm Beach Atlantic University, contemplates a shot. The game is now regularly played at the National Croquet Centre in America.



Dear Auntie Peggy Why do they make the hoops so narrow? I line myself up very carefully but I usually fail to go through even from a short distance away. What do you recommend?

Auntie's advice: "There's a new game for you too. It is called MALLETBALL. Same rules as Golf Croquet, same 3lb mallets but footballs are used instead of croquet balls and the hoops are much wider."



Toequet developed into Malletball when the originators found that using standard croquet mallets with footballs avoided the problem of bad playing surfaces and long grass.

Left: Archie Peek, Director of Croquet at the National Croquet Centre, demonstrates Malletball in front of the clubhouse.

Croquet - and Egyptian Women

(Article published in The Guardian on 3rd August by Mark MacKenzie.)

In the glorious days of empire, a gentleman's ears knew what to expect of the sounds of an English summer: tinkling ice cubes in a gin and tonic; rippling applause from the cricket pavilion; the clunk of a neatly swung croquet mallet. In the intervening years, however, our aural landscape began to change. These days, a chap is more likely to tune in to a party in the park or a rowdy street carnival. And jolly old croquet has disappeared from the public consciousness. In modern Britain, croquet suffers from a distinctly provincial image; manicured lawns presided over by officious 'life-member' committee men munching cucumber sandwiches. Cliche perhaps, but as a representation of 'association croquet', the prevalent form of the sport in the UK, it is pretty accurate.

Last year, the game's status as a fusty colonial-era relic seemed to be confirmed by Lord McLaurin, then chairman of the England and Wales Cricket Board, who warned that should his own sport fail to get its administrative house in order, cricket was in danger of becoming 'a former sport of the summer ... like croquet'. Predictably, responses of jowl-wobbling indignation hit the letters' desk of the Daily Telegraph. Yet amid the grumbling from croquet clubs around the country were some more progressive voices.

For the past two decades a quiet war has been raging over the future of this quintessentially British pastime. It is a story of sporting rebellion in middle England and of how a sedate summer diversion became an ally of feminism in the patriarchal society of the Arab world.

With its origins in 13th-century France, the game of association croquet dates back to Ireland in the 1830s. After crossing the Irish sea, it eventually became the founding sport of the All England Club in 1877, before making the mistake of throwing its lot in with another fledging summer sport, lawn tennis. During the Edwardian era, the game enjoyed aristocratic patronage and throughout the first world war was considered a civilising influence against the horrors of that particular conflict.

Put simply, the aim of association croquet is to manoeuvre two balls through a series of hoops before striking them against a peg at the centre of the lawn. By a combination of 'running' hoops and striking an opponent's balls, players build a tally of points in the way a snooker player might build a break. The better the player, the longer he can keep his opponent out of the game.

Among more accomplished exponents, the game's labyrinthine tactics can turn matches into esoteric mental jousts, likened by enthusiasts to 'chess on grass'. For the beginner, the downside is that it can take two years until you have the faintest idea of what's going on.

But in recent years, an aggressive interloper has appeared. 'Golf croquet' was originally developed by British soldiers in officers' clubs around Cairo at the end of the 19th century. Shorter and more combative than association croquet, when the British left, the game was refined by groundstaff at Cairo's Gezira country club.

Unlike the break-building tactics of association rules, golf croquet players actively contest hoops - once one ball goes through, a point is scored and play moves to the next hoop.

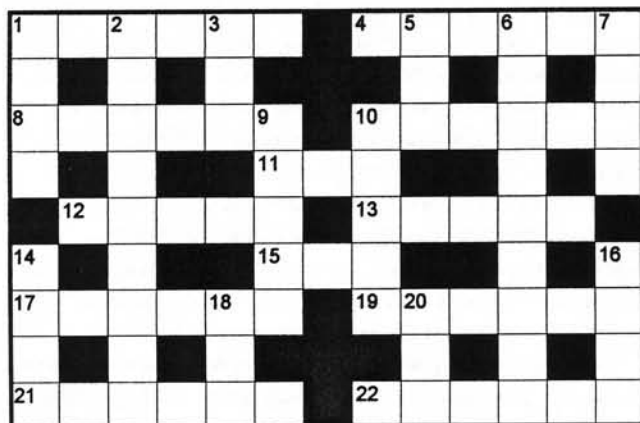
The rapid-fire nature of the game has seen its stock rise swiftly around the world. This year, when the sixth world golf croquet championships kicked off at the Sussex County Croquet Club in Brighton, there were players from Japan and South Africa. Most spectators, however, had come to see the Egyptians, including the favourite, Salah Hasan, a baby-faced caterer from Cairo, and twice world champion.

What makes Egyptians so good at it? "It's the way we play," says Hasan, who believes British players are too cautious. "In Egypt," he says, "the game is played in highly competitive evening leagues and our long season (August to June) means we are always practising, which in Europe is not possible because of the weather."

In Egypt, the rise of golf croquet has led to some interesting social repercussions, not least in the sporting aspirations of the country's women. Of Egypt's 2,500 players, around 30% are female.

(continued next page)

Len's Crossword Corner



ACROSS

1. Short for the Metropolitan Police - all mixed up. (6)
4. When you play the game, be sure to your authority. (6)
8. Resist a relative. (6)
10. Can't you see there's of room past that hoop. (6)
11. This has earned its praise. (3)

12. St. Ian on material things. (5)
13. Smelly stuff inside Science Fiction. (5)
15. Anger. (3)
17. Boring things do this, by George! (6)
19. These come in a multitude of special ways, but they always please. (6)
21. East N E (Anag). (6)
22. You may feel this with one hoop needed to win. (6)

DOWN

1. Think on. (4)
2. San Fernando! You missed it. (4-5)
3. A doubles winner. (3)
5. Dry as wine? (3)
6. Your hopes of winning do this when 6-1 down. (9)
7. Starts most games. (4)
9. If you do this on your seventh hoop you've won or it's raining. (3-2)
10. In the beginning it's soon settled. (5)
14. A handicap game won points to your handicap card (4)
16. Makes use of. (4)
18. One finger raised, it's a batsman's nightmare. (3)
20. When this sets in you're in trouble. (3)

(Answers next issue - or buy Len a beer!)



Left: Len Buckingham crowns Una and Judith with the winners' laurel wreaths (kindly provided by Diana Phelps); above, runner-up George Lawson stops John Cundell's wreath from slipping off - more hair needed! At right: most of the Singles Team at the end of Saturday's event.



Photos: John Fogg

Club Tournament

The Club Singles and Doubles Champions were decided over the weekend of 18/19th September - Saturday was Singles day and saw John Cundell successfully defending the title by beating George Lawson 7/5; whilst on Sunday Judith and Una Pengelly came out as Doubles Champions, beating Margaret and George Lawson in an exciting final - with Judith striking a fantastic 2-3 metre jump shot at the 12th hoop

when it looked like the game would go to the 13th.

All those who took part enjoyed the weekend - even if it was a trifle wet on Saturday and chilly on Sunday. It was nice to see some of our newer and less experienced players joining in, they certainly did not disgrace themselves, and all said afterwards that the experience was valuable.

12 members took part in the Singles and 16 in the Doubles. Let's try and double these numbers for 2005.

Results

Singles:

Round 1: Phelps 7, Clay 1; John Cundell 7, Guest 2; E Buckingham 7, J Pengelly 6; Cross 2, G Lawson 7. **Round 2:** M Lawson 7, Phelps 4; Brown 3, Cundell 7; L Buckingham 7, Eve Buckingham 3; Hickman 3, G Lawson 7. **Semis:** M Lawson 4, Cundell 7; Buckingham 4, G Lawson 7. **Final:** Cundell 7, G Lawson 5. **Winner: John Cundell.**

Doubles:

Round 1: Cundells 7, Clay/Miller 6; Lawsons 7, Joy Bown/Richard Graves 4; Pengellys 7, Buckingham 4; Fogs 7, Peter Stevens/Phelps 4. **Semis:** Cundells 6, Lawsons 7; Pengellys 7, Fogs 6. **Final:** Lawsons 5, Pengellys 7. **Winners: Una and Judith Pengelly.**

'Croquet & Egyptian Women' - continued)

In what remains a male-dominated society, it is one of the rare sports where men and women compete on an equal footing. In 2005, Egypt plans to host the first women-only world championship.

Leading the charge back in Brighton was Manal Ali Mohsen, a politics graduate from Cairo who, in just four years, has risen to become Egypt's number-two woman player. The number one, Naheed Hassan, has been playing for 30 years. "In Egypt," says Ali Mohsen, "women use golf croquet as a social occasion. Players come from tight communities and my mother played for 30 years."

Despite the global inroads made by golf croquet, in Britain the association game remains king. Forty of the world's top 100 players hail from these shores and every two years, when the best of these compete in the MacRobertson Shield - croquet's equivalent of the Ashes and named after Macpherson Robertson, an Australian confectionery millionaire - Britain regularly steals the honours.

But things could have been different. On April 7th 1984 at the Hurlingham Club in London, the Croquet Association, the game's ruling body, held an annual general meeting to vote on an issue threatening to change England's green and pleasant croquet landscape forever. Keen to secure mainstream television coverage for the sport, a splinter movement had put together a pilot television programme. Believing it to have wider appeal than the ponderous association game, they chose to promote golf croquet, then little-known in Britain. The

BBC was interested - now all that was required was for the game's hierarchy to rubberstamp the project.

Parking his tanks on the establishment's lawns was Stephen Mulliner, who had earned his association stripes, but was also one of the few Englishmen to have come close to challenging the Egyptian hegemony by placing fourth in the 2000 world championships.

In 1984, he believed the opportunity to milk the cash cow feeding other minority sports was too good to miss. "We were coming out of a bit of a recession and advertising revenues had begun to pick up," he says. Incongruous as it seems, our main rivals (for sponsorship) were snooker and darts and they had got their feet back in the door. "And in golf croquet," he argued, "the emphasis is on one hoop at a time and it's far more telegenic."

The game's old guard panicked, fearing this bastard version of the game would swamp Britain's clubs and sound a death knell for the association format. The vote itself was the sweetest of English fudges. Of the Croquet Association's 1,500 membership, only 73 - less than 5% - bothered to turn up. After intense lobbying, the result could hardly have been closer, 35 members voted in favour of promoting golf croquet on television, 36 against.

Still, Mulliner remains optimistic. "The extravagant statements made about the doom that would engulf the association game have proved nonsense," he says.

"Golf croquet is now the lifeblood of some of our smaller clubs. It's the better contest. Some association players may not like it ... but the writing's on the wall."

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND END OF SEASON PARTY

COME and HAVE YOUR SAY at the AGM at NORTHALL VILLAGE HALL on

FRIDAY 19th NOVEMBER 2004 at 7.30pm - and then join in the fun.