

THE FIRST TWO YEARS OF THE NORTH WEST FEDERATION OF CROQUET CLUBS

by Neil Williams, Development Officer, North West Federation, February, 2002.

First Steps: The CA Development Scheme & the Development Officers

One of the direct consequences of the Croquet Association's Development Scheme from 1970 to 1976 was the foundation in 1973 of two "federations" of croquet clubs - in the West Midlands and the North West of England. The idea was that by banding together, the clubs in each of these areas would share money, resources and expertise to the advantage of everyone in their respective regions. Inter-club and inter-federation matches could be organised by these federations; coaching, croquet demonstrations, recruitment drives and the like could be supported. The aim was more and better croquet. The establishment of the Development Scheme that had made the federations possible had been bitterly opposed. Elements within the croquet world had seen anything to do with "development" as a threat to what they regarded as the unchanging order of things, with which they felt comfortable. The then editor, Brian Lloyd-Pratt, had attacked the scheme in the Croquet Gazette. He wrote: "If the Croquet World sells out to vague 'progressive' fantasies it will find it has sold its birthright for a mess of unpalatable egalitarian pottage". Nonetheless, in the teeth of such reactionary views, the CA had gone ahead and accepted the Central Council For Physical Recreation (later, The Sports Council, then Sport England) grant which would fund the Scheme. They appointed two Development Officers, Liz Neal and Barbara Meachem, at a fee of £250 each, plus expenses, including a 10 ½ d (about 4p) per mile petrol allowance. They were later called by Brian Lloyd-Pratt "Two Ladies of little importance". One (Liz) was to work primarily in the West Midlands and the other (Barbara) in the North West, although it was never as clear cut as that. Their brief, partly produced by Roger Bray, was first to sort out the CA membership, and second to find out which of the clubs on the CA's books actually existed. Further than that, they had the job of starting new clubs, and bringing existing clubs into contact with each other, which was where the idea of federations came into the picture.

The Founding of the North West Federation

We were the second federation to be founded. West Midlands preceded us by a month. At the time there were only four croquet clubs in the North West - Bowdon, Ellesmere, Southport and Radbroke Hall. The first three had been struggling, but were beginning to turn the corner by the time Barbara and Liz started to make contact, thanks to the efforts of a few local zealots such as Ena and May Hawkins at Southport; Alix Fotiadi at Bowdon; Neil Williams at both; Nell Tyldesley at Ellesmere and Bowdon. The timing of the Development Scheme could not have been better from their point of view. The two Development Officers brought much-needed practical support as well as fresh thinking. At Radbroke Hall, Barry Keen, Peter Bowler, Eddie Bell, John Rose and others were keen to co-operate with the long-established clubs. At 2.30pm on Saturday, 31 March, 1973, eight people gathered round a table at the Ellesmere clubhouse (it was the only centrally-heated clubhouse in the north west) to inaugurate the North West Federation of Croquet Clubs: Mrs Tyldesley and Mrs Christie (Ellesmere); Mr N. Williams (Bowdon); Mr E. Halliwell (Southport); Mr B. Keen and Mr P. Bowler (Radbroke); Dr. B. Sandiford (Lytham St Anne's, even though the club was not then in operation); Mrs B. Meachem (CA). Neil Williams was elected Chairman, Peter Bowler Hon. Secretary. The main business was to establish the name and aims of the federation, to agree the production of a publicity leaflet and to form a North West League. The first official Spring Meeting was planned for April 29 at the same venue.

The First Two Seasons (1973 and 1974)

A leaflet duly appeared, containing a calendar of events - Handicap American tournaments at Bowdon (a club CA event) and Radbroke Hall; croquet demonstrations at Ellesmere and Southport. A constitution was agreed. League fixtures were played, Ellesmere emerging as the first League Champions. At the end of the season, both Development Officers came to the Autumn meeting, when we learnt that, owing to Barclay's Bank having taken over Radbroke Hall, the croquet players there had joined the Datsen Sports Club at Culcheth, which thus became the first new club to join the federation. The CA had presented a silver "Sweet dish" for the winner of a friendly match between the North West and the West Midlands federations. The match had been won by the North West. In 1974, Ellesmere again won the League, and at the end-of-season meeting on November 9, 1974, Neil Williams, in his final act as Chairman (he was moving north to Cumbria, where there was then no croquet), announced that in 1975 Bowdon would be holding an official CA weekend tournament over the August Bank Holiday. He saw this, the Minutes tell us, as a first step in the re-establishment of the Northern Championships, not held since the Second World War.

Neil Williams 2002

Can You Help?

It would be good to carry on this history of the North West Federation. Which club was next to join? (Was it Pendle? - We have information about the federation taking a lead in an attempt to found a club there). But records are thin on the ground about subsequent developments. Club secretaries will have Minute Books, so we can establish when clubs came into existence and the circumstances in which they did so. We can also find out when they joined the federation.

I have obtained the following information from perusing old editions of the Croquet Gazette:

1974 - Neil Williams was Chairman. Barbara Meacham was a driving force behind the formation of the Federation and is now succeeded by Liz Neal. Full programme of inter club matches was completed with Ellesmere taking the title, plus a federation match against the West Midlands. Croquet demonstrations had been staged with the CA lending loudspeaker equipment. Two new clubs have been formed and a possible third next year. (*Croquet Gazette, April 1974*).

1974 - Two new clubs joined the Federation - Canute and Radbroke Hall (HQ Barclays Bank). Dr Sandiford from Southport has been giving regular Croquet demonstrations to students at Nelson & Colne College. Ellesmere are assured of the league title. Southport membership has almost trebled in last two years. Bowdon is having a difficult time. Lytham are searching for somewhere to play. Datsen have reached the semi final of the Longman Cup. (*Croquet Gazette, October 1974*).

1975 - Indoor croquet started at Burscough Sports Centre. Neil Williams represented England against Scotland, Datsen won the Longman Cup and a North West team beat the West Midlands. Datsen and Ellesmere shared the league title. (*Croquet Gazette, April 1976*).

1976 - Bowdon have increased membership to more than 50 and attempts are being made to start a new club on the Wirral at Ellesmere Port.

1976 Season	P	W	D	L	G	Pts
Datsen	6	5	1	0	25-11	11
Southport	6	2	1	3	15-22	5
Bowdon	6	2	0	4	15-20	4

Ellesmere	6	1	2	3	16-20	4
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Successful tournaments were held at Bowdon and Southport. West Midlands Federation were beaten three times, the first match being played indoors at Burscough Sports Centre. It is planned to run a Winter League indoors at Burscough throughout the Winter. Written by Brian Slater, Hon Sec.

1977 - Name of Federation changed and now included all north of England clubs. Brian Slater was Secretary. (*Croquet Gazette, Summer 1978*).

1977 Season	P	W	D	L	G	Pts
Ellesmere	6	5	0	1	22-14	10
Daten	6	3	1	2	21-15	7
Southport	6	1	1	3	16-20	4
Bowdon	6	1	1	4	13-23	3

1979 - Chairman and Secretary were N Tyldesley and A C Mason. Clubs were Ellesmere, Canaute, Southport & Birkdale, Bowdon, Liverpool University, Daten, Radbroke Hall and Chester. Ellesmere B were the 1978 champions with Bowdon A the Runners-up. (*Source Minutes of Meeting held at Ellesmere on 17 Feb 79*).

1982 - Spring Meeting of the Northern Federation of Croquet Clubs was held at Ellesmere Club attended by 15 members. Mrs Nell Tyldesley and Mr A C Mason were elected unopposed as Chairman and Secretary respectively. Five tournaments will be held at Southport and Bowdon. One of the Pimms Internationals (England v Scotland) will be held at Southport (12 June). An inter-federation match between West Midlands and the North to be played at Southport on 19 September. There will be a referees training course at Bowdon in March. (*The Croquette Gazette, Spring 1982*).

1988 - A very successful year. The ladies of Ellesmere became the first all-ladies team to win the Longman Cup. Secretarys Shield won by Teeside, taking over from the previous holders, Bowdon. The Presidents Cup and the Mens Championship were won by two boys from the same year in the same school (Chris Clarke and Mark Saurin). Pendle won the Northern League and also the Short League. Southport have increased membership to over 60 and submitted a five year plan to the local Council to acquire more land. Manufacture and marketing of Southport Balls has been put on a commercial basis. A new club has been formed at Bury Sports Club. In November, members were saddened to hear of the death of Nell Tyldesley, one of the founder members of the Federation and Chairman for eight years. (*Croquet Gazette, March 1989*).

Obituary Nell Tyldesley

Many people throughout the Croquet world will be saddened by the news of the death of Nell Tyldesley. Nell died peacefully on the 26th November, 1988, after a twelve month illness which she bore with great fortitude.



She joined the Ellesmere Club in Worsley over thirty years ago, primarily to play bridge, but as there was no House membership, she joined the Croquet section. In those days the sequence game was played by the Ellesmere ladies. Together with her late husband, Jack, she visited other clubs where she discovered a very different

kind of game. Not only did Nell master Association croquet but she brought it back to Ellesmere and successfully converted the ladies to it - quite a fait accompli! Nell became a very good player. She was a great competitor and gave much confidence and encouragement to all those she taught and played with. She also played very good and competitive bridge.

Nell was Secretary at Ellesmere for many years and realised the importance of getting together with other clubs. The organising of 'friendlies' for a few seasons made her acutely aware of the necessity for a Federation. After long discussions with the then one and only Federation, the West Midlands, and with much help from Barbara Meacham and Liz Neal, Nell formed the Northern Federation in 1973. She was its Chairman for eight years and the North's first representative on Council. During her period of Chairmanship, Croquet in the North progressed from weakness to quite formidable strength.

Nell will be remembered for her great tenacity of purpose and her tireless work in the development of the game she loved so much. She will be sadly missed by her many friends.

Pat Hague.

1990 - The Northern Federation of Croquet Clubs was reformed as three separate bodies - North West; Yorkshire and Humberside; Croquet North. (*Croquet Gazette*, March 1990).

1993 - Now 10 clubs in region, including two school clubs and runs regional association league and a short croquet league, the winners being Bury and Radbroke Hall respectively in 1992. Congratulations

to Southport on winning the Longman Cup, Pendle in winning the national Short competition and Bowdon who were runners up in the Mary Rose. Bury Grammar School has established a club and UptonCroquet Club has joined the Federation (they have played Golf Croquet for 70 years). (*Croquet Gazette, April 1993*).

If you can contribute material from your own club, please contact:

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You can read the Histories of Chester Club and Pendle Club on their webpages.
