
‘WORLD FIRST’ IN ANCIENT CHOULE/JEU DE CROSSE

By Geert Nijs

On the 9th and 10th August golf historians from all over the world met in Belgium to experience, after reading the book ‘CHOULE – The Non-Royal but most Ancient Game of Crosse’, the real thing on the crosse fields of the Society 'Les Amis du Pic et du Plat' at Baudour, near the beautiful city of Mons (Bergen) in Belgium. For the first time in the almost 1.000 years history of ‘choule’ (for the Anglophones) or ‘jeu de crosse’ or ‘crossage’ (for the Francophones), golf players from Australia, Belgium, France, Germany, The Netherlands and Scotland came to the Belgian crosse fields to get to know in practice this remarkable very ancient continental golf game.

The golf historical societies of Australia, Britain and Europe were well represented by their respective captains: Michael Sheret, David Hamilton and Christoph Meister.



*Michael Sheret, overjoyed at hitting the planchette –
Photo by courtesy of Johann de Boer*

Under the guidance of Marius Hallez, president of the Baudour crosse society, the very proud and friendly crosseurs showed the participants with infinite patience how to play the game, how to handle the crosse clubs (reversed baseball grip), how and when to choose one of the many different ellipsoid balls, from small, heavy and extreme rigid nylon balls to very large light cork balls (bouchons). They explained when and how to ‘chouler’ and ‘déchouler’, etc.



Christoph Meister and Geert Nijs being taught how to proceed from here to the next planchette

The crosse clubs and choulettes are produced by the players themselves. There are no pro-shops or Nevada Bob's where you can buy choule equipment.

There is no coordinating ‘Saint Andrews’-like organisation to set general accepted rules. Contradictory to the French crosseurs who have fixed rules, the Belgians are free to produce equipment as they like. You see therefore golf drivers with reinforced (5 mm) strike faces, original crosse clubs with metal shafts, and grips made of insulation tapes. Balls are hand made from nylon, pressed wood, cork, willow, boxwood, etc.

There are just a few basic rules for the game. Players decide among themselves on how to go about special situations in the field.

The difference between the ‘progressive’ Belgian game and the ‘traditional’ French game has become so big, that at this moment, it is hardly possible to have cross-border tournaments between them.

The foreign players were flabbergasted about the ingenuity of the sport, about the surprising likeness between the royal game and the common game.



After the outstanding perseverance on the crosse field, David Hamilton deserved a pint of outstanding Belgian beer

The teaching and the playing on the field were regularly paused with a glass of famous Belgian beer, traditional crosseur meals, medieval music with ancient 'cornemuses' (Belgian bagpipes) and accordion instruments and by singing the very ancient song of Saint Anthony, since more than 600 years the patron saint of all crosseurs (and of all golfers).

Sara Nijs, co-author of the 'Choule book' and organiser of this unforgettable event, offered in the name of all golfers a statue of Saint Anthony to the Pic et Plat society, with the plea that the patron saint may help to preserve this wonderful game for many years to come.

For more detailed information about choule/jeu de crosse see www.ancientgolf.dse.nl

JEU DE MAIL/PALL MALL/ MALIËN

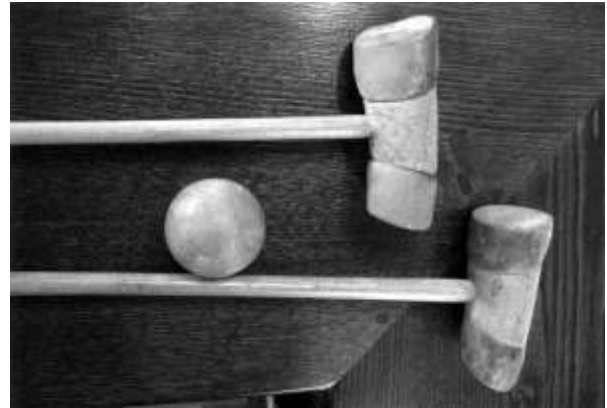


Last year at the annual meeting at Bad Ischl, we had the opportunity to present our research on the ancient game of choule/jeu de crosse. You can imagine that we are very proud that golf history interested people from several parts of the world have asked to acquire a copy of our publication 'CHOULE – The Non-Royal but most Ancient Game of Crosse'.

We have found so much pleasure in researching this ancient game that we are planning, analogous to the choule study, to start new research on the history of jeu de mail (pall mall in English, maliën

in Dutch, etc.). This game is so well known by its name but hardly by its contents.

Jeu de mail was not only played by 'Le Roi Soleil' at Paris, by the Duke of York on the Mall in London or by the commoners on the tracks around Montpellier, but also in various other countries in Europe.



We wonder if readers of our Golfika magazine have information available about where, when, by whom and how this game was played. It would help Sara and me very much in directing our research. Thank you very much for your kind help. Geert Nijs - ancientgolf@wanadoo.fr