

Jeu de Crosse in Belgium



INTRIGUED BY THE ACCOUNT of the mediaeval stick and ball game *choule/jeu de crosse* in the March 2008 issue of *TTG* a party of golf historians descended in August on the village of Baudour, near the ancient city of Mons in Belgium. These included our BGCS Captain, David Hamilton, Michael Sheret, Captain of the Australian GHS, and Christoph Meister, President of the EAGCH. Their guides were Geert and Sara Nijs, authors of the comprehensive book on the game: *Choules - The Non-Royal but most Ancient Game of Crosse*. Hosts were the *Société Les Amis du Pic et du Plat*; venue was the clubhouse and ancient crosse fields of the *Société*.

Marius Hallez, the President, and other members of the Baudour *Société* demonstrated the swing, often using a reverse baseball grip, left hand below right. The ellipsoid balls (*choulettes*) vary in density from small, solid nylon, through turned willow or boxwood, to light cork *bouchons* – part of the skill in the game being when to use the different types. They also demonstrated the different strategies of hitting towards the target (*chouler au planchette*), and hitting away from it (*déchouler*).

There is no organisation like the R&A or USGA to co-ordinate accepted rules. Contrasting with the French *crosseurs* who have fixed rules, Belgians are free to improvise equipment.

Some *crosseurs* use conventional golf drivers with reinforced faces; others have original crosse clubheads with metal shafts, and grips made of insulation tape.

There are just a few basic rules for the game and players decide among themselves on how to adjudicate special situations during play. The differences between the 'progressive' Belgian game and the 'traditional' French version have become so great that currently, it is hardly possible to have cross-border matches.

Coaching was interrupted with regular refreshment breaks in the clubhouse for traditional *crosseur* food, washed down by pints of famous Belgian beer and accompanied by ancient music from accordions and Belgian bagpipes. On behalf of all golfers, Sara presented to the *Société Les Amis du Pic et du Plat*, a statue of St Anthony, the patron Saint of all *crosseurs* (and golfers), with the plea he may help to preserve this wonderful game for many years to come. In turn, the *Société* gave each of the golf historians a present of an authentic crosse club and *chouettes*.

JOHN PEARSON

For more information about choules/jeu de crosse see Geert and Sara's excellent website www.ancientgolf.dse.nl



David and Sara at the ninth *planchette*.



Geert explains the design of the double-purpose crosse club