

Collecting European clubs and balls

By Geert and Sara Nijs

Every now and again auction houses, antique dealers and private persons offer for sale clubs and balls once (or still) used in the continental golf-like games colf/kolf, crosse/choule and mail/mall. The way in which these rather exceptional collectables are named and described by the auctioneers shows that there is limited knowledge of these games and their equipment. They probably use the information provided by their clients. It seems that sometimes these clients may be rather ignorant about what they have collected.



AN ANTIQUE DEALER offered a colf club head from the "early 17th century" for € 1,500. However the club head was from the late 19th century and was used in the indoor kolf game.

Collectors sometimes would like to include such a piece of historical equipment linked so closely to golf in their collection. For the serious collectors it is important to know what kind of game we are talking about, which are the clubs and balls used, when and where were they used and whether they are rare or rather common. Till recently hardly any research has been done and published in English about these continental golf-related games. Therefore it is difficult for auctioneers, museum curators, antique dealers, etc. to acquire some knowledge about these games.

It was in 1982 that for the first time Steven van Hengel in his book *Early Golf* explained some historical and equipment details about Netherlandish colf. In 2008, the first ever study was published about the game of crosse. In this book 'CHOULE - The Non-Royal but most Ancient Game of Crosse' information is given about the clubs (crosses) and balls (choulettes).



CROSSE BALLS are recognisable for their ellipsoid shape. From left: a golf ball, an original boxwood ball, a modern hornbeam ball, a celluloid ball, a nylon ball and a 'pressed wood' ball.



ANOTHER AUCTIONEER offered a "chole club with seven chole balls and four other balls." However the seven balls are probably "jeu de mail" or "eu de boule" balls. The other four balls are the real "chole" (crosse) balls recognisable by their ellipsoid shape. Such balls are still used in Belgium.

A French language edition was published in 2012. In 2011, 2014 and 2015, the studies *Games for Kings & Commoners' Part One, Two and Three* were issued which included detailed information about clubs and balls used in the continental games and their development during the centuries.

We would like to provide some basic information on continental clubs and balls.

Colf was played in the Low Countries from the 13th century until the early 18th century. Players used wooden balls of different sizes and since the 17th century also hair-filled leather balls (which were also exported to Scotland). One or two excavated specimens may be found but only in museums. Already at the beginning of the 15th century clubs had metal heads made of lead-tin alloy, bronze and brass. The shaft was made of ash. Complete clubs have never been on the market.



COLF CLUBS – Top, a complete colf club from the 16th century. Bottom row of three, the "pin" club head (left) is the oldest example of a colf head (15th or 16th century). The club heads made of lead-tin alloy (middle) are found regularly in the Netherlands and mainly date back to the 17th century. Brass club heads (right) are very rare. At an auction some years ago such a club head (17th century) was sold for £20,000.



ON THE WEBSITE of a leading golf museum a club is shown which is called a "jeu de mail" club. A tile shows the game of 'kolf or jeu de mail'. However the club shown is a so-called "brochon" used in the game of crosse. The picture on the Delft Blue tile shows the Netherlandish/Flemish game of "beugelen."



ANCIENT CLUBS from around 1900 used in kolf in the court game. The club on the left is protected by a wooden cover against damage. – www.colf-kolf.nl

Lead-tin alloy club heads are regularly found during excavations and by metal detector hobbyists. Finds of bronze and especially brass club heads are exceptional. Most finds date back to the 17th century. Generally, such colf club heads are shorter than 10 centimetres.

Kolf as an indoor game evolved from the outdoor and ice colf game at the end of the 17th century. Originally colf clubs with heads larger than 10 centimetres were used. Finally special indoor kolf clubs were made. Balls have become much bigger in size and made of sagathy or rubber. Such clubs and balls are still produced.

PUTTING

CONTINUED FROM 25

Eventually, the Queen confides that she feels a captive of the Palace and would like to experience some of the everyday realities of life from which she is ordinarily, and necessarily, shielded.

Thus, we find a shopping trip arranged by Badger to a nearby supermarket; a marvelous “adventure” the Queen tells her disbelieving circle.

Emboldened, the monarch engages Badger for a trip on the “Tube” (much



THE ORIGINAL small-headed brochon (bottom). In the middle the large-headed brochon used with celluloid balls (now obsolete). The mid-20th century “manchon” (top) for use with nylon balls; such clubs are still made.

Pallamaglio is originally an Italian game that entered France in the 16th century (jeu de mail) and spread all over western Europe under the names pall mall (English), maliën (Netherlandish), etc. until the end of the 18th century. The game was played with box wood or evergreen oak balls, varying in size. The clubs consisted of an iron bound cylindrical ash or lotus tree wooden head fixed to a long whippy wooden shaft from ash or lotus tree wood.

Crosse (choule in English) has been played in Belgium and France since at least the 14th century. The balls (choulettes) have an ellipsoid shape and are made of boxwood or hornbeam with knife-cut dimples, grooves or ridges. In Belgium balls have different sizes and are also made of pressed wood, celluloid and nylon.

The clubs (crosses) have an ash wood shaft and a metal club head. The original joint of shaft and head is the insertion of a bent ash stick straight into the rear of the head. Such a club is called a “brochon.” Half-way through the 20th century the straight end of the

to the dismay of Palace security), and a clandestine trip to a neighborhood pub for a sip of cask ale, chatting up a hotel doorman on break at the next table.

It is for the inside jokes, the delicate liberties in language and the verbal jousts between HRH and Mr. Badger (the latter conjuring a mandatory stay in the Tower should he go too far) that we come to relish each new twist, as well as Badger’s deft handling of his employer’s whims, questions, and fancies.

This is a delightful book, full of

shaft entered into a socket which is welded onto the crosse head. This so-called “crosse à manchon” is still made by private artisans.

We are not collectors, so we have no knowledge about the guide prices for the clubs and balls. Over the last decade we amassed knowledge about these golf-like games which we would like to share with you. For more detailed information about the games and their equipment, contact us at ancientgolf@wanadoo.fr or have a look at our website www.ancientgolf.dse.nl.



THE “JEU DE MAIL” (pall-mall) game was once very popular with kings and commoners, especially in France. Because the game lost the interest of most players at the end of the 18th century most clubs are eaten in the meantime by the wood worms. Clubs in a good condition are sometimes offered at auctions. Famous club makers (palemardiers), such as Coste, Grasse, Richard, etc. put their name on the club head.

gentle humor and the delicious portrait of the world’s most royal personage made wonderfully human.

Badger is, I suspect, Georgiady’s alter ego. A lifelong fan of Great Britain, he made five trips there in the 1960s (“to visit pubs, see rock bands, and attend football matches”) before studying law – and golf – at the University of Dundee in 1971-72. He became well acquainted with the area’s famous golf courses, and its ales, especially Mann’s Brown Ale.

Surely Badger, and Her Majesty, would approve.