



MCC

A CLUB WITHOUT A PURPOSE

By Nigel Knott

Ongoing administrative shambles casts ever darkening shadows over Lord's

“WG Grace will be spinning in his grave”

THE MCC – A CLUB WITHOUT A PURPOSE

Introduction

It is a well-known fact that successful organisations cannot be run by committees, let alone by a Secretary, a Deputy Secretary, four Assistant Secretaries and more than 150 unelected Members of various sub-committees advising a main Committee responsible for the entire management of everything. A Royal Charter Company, with an annual turnover in excess of £50 million and known as the MCC, embraces this extraordinary method of government. The consequence has been years of mismanagement, waste and lack of accountability that has had lasting negative results both for the Club itself and for the 18,000 full Members.

In 1867 the MCC's original Rule Book consisted of four and a half pages. Today this Rule Book has spawned into more than 50 pages of Rules approved by Members at a General Meeting, supplemented by a further 50-page book of Regulations defined by the Committee without Member approval. The difference remains unclear.

No Business Plans are published or acknowledged by the Committee. Yet few Members seem aware of, or even seem to care about the damage being caused. Such as it is, this threadbare business model depends largely on the English Cricket Board (ECB) allocating at least two Test Matches annually to Lord's. The MCC-ECB relationship therefore has become central to the Club's continued solvency and needs to be as close and cordial as possible. Inevitably, this has resulted in a loss of organisational and commercial independence and potential revenue.

Meantime, the Committee has remained responsible according to the Rules for the entire management of Club affairs since 1866. A doctrine of collective responsibility and omerta-style secrecy ensures that Committee members remain unaccountable and immunized from any charges of inefficiency and negligence. The proceedings of all Committee meetings are enveloped in a shroud of confidentiality with Minutes released months late and only in partial form. "Ordinary" Members who demand closer scrutiny are considered unwelcome agent provocateurs.

From a Membership of 18,000, no more than 7,000 utilise the benefit of attending major matches at Lord's, free of charge at one time, and never more than 50% of Members vote at General Meetings. The time has come to review the structuring of the inequitable Membership Subscriptions.

Club History

The year 1787, when Thomas Lord leased a ground in Dorset Square for 20 years, can be identified as the moment when a number of cricket enthusiasts from all walks of life decided to bring a sense of community to the game of cricket which, until then, had simply been a well-practised ad hoc past time. This group included the Prince of Wales and his brother each of whom had been enthusiastic supporters of the game since the middle of the Century.

As Membership of the MCC grew, so did the number of well-connected cricketers in its ranks and the need for a playing area governed by an agreed set of Laws. Thomas Lord responded by leasing a suitable playing area from the Eyre Estate in 1808. The *Morning Post* of 27 April 1809 announced the opening of "Lord's Saint John's Wood Cricket Ground." The MCC moved to its new home in 1810.

The opportunity to purchase the freehold at auction from the Eyre Estate arose in 1860. Unwisely, the MCC Committee failed to bid. Isaac Moses bought the freehold for £7,000. Moses (later Marsden) sold the freehold six years later to the Club for £18,667 on 22 August 1866. A pattern of missed opportunities had begun.

In 1864 the MCC Committee prepared plans to make Lord's the permanent home of the Club. Five Trustees were appointed in March 1864 to broker the arrangements. These Trustees were described "as persons of sufficient stature and respect in the community to enjoy the confidence of the Membership in preparation for the purchase of their Cricket Ground at NW8 to secure the Club's future."

It was the action of one of the Trustees, William Nicholson, with his provision of the necessary mortgage funds, that finally secured the MCC's future at Lord's. The Club prospered and soon gained the respect of the cricketing fraternity everywhere to become the undisputed premier cricket club in the world domiciled at Lord's – the Mecca of Cricket. In particular, the Club's leadership in setting out a Code of Conduct (the Laws of the Game) ensured a reliable reference point in times of dispute.

At the Annual Dinner in 1870 the Club Secretary, RA Fitzgerald, proposed what might be the MCC's first Mission Statement. It was, he said, "To preserve the game from all abuses, to foster a healthy emulation in our Schools and Universities and to inculcate the principles of discipline, good temper and sobriety. (These) are the real aims and ends of the MCC".

The Origins of Strife

Fitzgerald's definition of MCC's purpose remained broadly true well into the 20th Century. Yet, sadly, the Club today is powerless to carry it out having been stripped of all wider responsibilities exercised over the national sport in 1969. It was then, more than 50 years ago, that the seeds of discontent among Members were sown. The decline began and followed a government ruling that a club of private members, such as the MCC, should no longer govern a national sport.

Instead, a new structure emerged. At its head was a Cricket Council (CC) as the governing body of the sport in the UK, supported by an executive administration known as the Test and County Cricket Board. The TCCB morphed into the English Cricket Board (ECB) in the mid-1990s. The MCC nevertheless retained a significant voice within the Cricket Council through overlapping memberships and Gubby Allen (then MCC Treasurer) became the first Chairman. Over time, the TCCB became unhappy with its subservient status and sought to remove the dominant influence of the Cricket Council (and the MCC) by establishing a governing role for itself. Competing personalities within the two organisations eventually led to ructions.

Aided and abetted by the actions of MCC Members serving within the TCCB, a putsch was organised which resulted in the effective removal of the governing powers of the Cricket Council. Allen resigned from the Council with a forecast that troubled times lay ahead for the MCC and the game of cricket itself. He was proved prescient.

In 1986 the premature death of the MCC President resulted in Colin Cowdrey being appointed. He, together with Raman Subba Row (TCCB Chairman), secretly agreed terms and conditions for the TCCB to play Test Match Cricket at Lord's. MCC Members, the owners of Lord's, were not informed and their consent was never sought or obtained for the changes that necessarily followed.

The Truth Emerges; impact on MCC's role 1987-2021

A reaction was inevitable. The gathering storm finally erupted at the Club's Bicentenary AGM in May 1987 when the truth emerged and tensions behind the scenes broke into the open. The MCC Treasurer, David Clarke, resigned and the Secretary, Jack Bailey, was effectively sacked. Headlines in the Sunday Telegraph "Cuckoo in the nest at Lord's" ensured a record turn out at the Bicentenary AGM.

For his part, the Club Lawyer, Alan Meyer, informed the AGM that in his view the Report and Accounts contained a statement that was misleading and untrue,

namely: *“In the interests of the Members, and with the necessary safeguards to their rights, the Committee has affirmed the TCCB’s ultimate responsibility for major matches played at Lord’s under its jurisdiction.”* Meyer revealed that no such safeguards, in fact, were in place.

Still, Colin Cowdrey, as President, proposed the adoption of the Report and Accounts and declared the Agenda Business Resolution approved. Pandemonium broke out at the meeting (attended by a record 1,400 Members) and a poll was demanded. The President was defeated and the AGM adjourned. Meyer was replaced soon afterwards ending 70 years of service from his Firm of Solicitors.

This was the first time in 200 years that the Club’s Annual Report and Accounts had been rejected by Members. No new date was set to complete the Ordinary Business Agenda of the adjourned AGM. Instead, the Committee called an SGM in July and announced a new relationship with the TCCB and its use of Lord’s. A Postal Ballot ordered by the Committee endorsed the proposals. The ordinary business of the adjourned AGM was never properly completed.

Four years later in 1991, following a Resolution passed at AGM during Dennis Silk’s Presidency, Lord Hugh Griffiths MC QC was appointed to carry out an enquiry into the administration of English Cricket. His Working Party recommended the introduction of a British Cricket Board of Control operating within the framework of a Cricket Constitution. Such a Constitution was never codified. Dennis Silk, however, moved from President of the MCC to become Chairman of the TCCB to oversee the transition.

By this stage it had become apparent that the ownership of Lord’s Cricket Ground, control of the Laws of Cricket and a long history of fostering the best interests of the national game were insufficient qualifications to guarantee that the Club retained wider powers and responsibilities. One of the consequences has been the game increasingly evolving away from its roots all over the world. Many forms of cricket are now played worldwide under local regulations with little or no reference to those Laws owned and promulgated by MCC. Even the administration and governance of most grass roots cricket in the UK – in Schools, at Universities and at Club level – has been devolved to the ECB.

Today, the much of the national game of cricket is essentially a commercial activity and the MCC, for all its claims to the contrary, is no longer the defender of the ‘spirit of cricket.’ In effect, the Club’s sole claim to any sort of leadership by 2020 came from Members’ ownership of Lord’s Cricket Ground. In consequence, the MCC languishes in the wilderness while still contributing significant financial resources to the wellbeing of the ECB and the game itself.

This decline has now lasted for more than 50 years and shows no obvious sign of abating. Yet the opportunity to go to Lord's to watch a game of cricket still attracts people to the Club and guarantees a Waiting List for Membership of more than 30 years. The number of Members joining as young talented players continues to dwindle and those who have represented the Club on the field of play are given no special privileges (apart from a tie) being registered as "Ordinary" Members. Worse still is the length of time they have to wait until their Subscription reduces at the age of 75. Many Members who have represented the MCC in their early-twenties will have to wait 50 years or more!

The Democratic Deficit – Bending the Rules

The gradual erosion of Member rights and privileges – the democratic underpinnings of MCC from the outset – began in 1973 when Michael Kempster QC was employed by the MCC Committee to draft a set of Rules to permit Proxy or Postal Voting.

Despite Mr. Kempster emphasizing that in his opinion postal voting could, and probably would, erode Member Rights and that the Committee would abuse its use, it appeared in 1987 following the Bicentenary AGM Committee defeat. In 2000 the Committee ended the practice of AGM Agenda Ordinary Business voting being restricted to Members in attendance.

Instead, the franchise was extended to cover the entire Membership via postal (and later remote) voting. The result was to give the Committee huge sway over its electorate – in particular, through direct instructions from the Chairman of the day to Members in the form of letters and/or a starring system for candidates trying to join the Committee. Most Members know little or nothing, nor care about, the detailed workings of the Club.

"Ordinary" AGM business is now classified as "Extraordinary" business and considered to be of significant importance for all Members to consider and vote upon without having to attend. As a consequence, the holding of the real time AGM has become meaningless when remote voting has already decided the outcome ahead of discussion at the actual meeting. Agenda items therefore cannot be approved with the application of any acceptable rule of law.

Even the provision of a postal voting system is suspect since no more than 6,000 Members (at most 35% of the total Membership) bother to vote in person or by post (and more recently electronically). Now the Chairman of the AGM (usually the President of the Club), the Club Chairman and the Committee are rarely troubled by unscheduled questions from the floor.

The classic example of the flaw in this voting system occurred in 2018 when the Auditors for the Accounts (KPMG) “cut and pasted” the wrong year into the Club Accounts which have never been re-printed. The MCC letter of engagement, dated 20th February 2018, was cited by the Auditors for the Accounts of 2017 and later for the Accounts of 2018.

To this day, Remote Voting procedures have not been approved by the Membership as a whole at an AGM/SGM for inclusion either in the MCC Rules or in the Club Regulations. It is unacceptable, and probably unlawful, to steamroller through vast swathes of unintelligible Rule changes at virtual GM’s in the absence of any formal discussion or debate with Members present.

The Abuse of the Club Rules

Following the purchase of Lord’s Cricket Ground, a set of Club Rules was codified and published in 1867. An all-powerful Committee was endowed with wide-ranging powers. Rule XII decreed: “The Committee will have the entire management of the property, funds and affairs of the Club whilst the property itself remains vested in the Trustees as ex-officio lifetime Club Officers”.

The composition of the Committee was defined in Rule X: “The President, the Treasurer, the Secretary, the Trustees and sixteen elected members, four of whom to be replaced at each ensuing AGM and not eligible for re-election for one year.” Rule XVIII stated: “Any additions/alterations to the Rules may be made if supported by a two-thirds majority of Members present at any special general meeting.”

These Rules were published in four and a half pages and remained virtually unchanged for nearly a century until the terms of service of the Trustees were altered in 1951. At that point the decline of traditional Member rights and privileges began their downward spiral.

Today, voting in person is no longer required nor is any discussion of General Meeting Agenda business permitted in advance of various forms of votes being sought by the Committee and cast remotely either in analogue or digital format. All forms of democratic back-and-forth debate and binding decisions made at AGM or SGMs have been restricted. The Committee has made it nearly impossible for Member Resolutions to be placed on the AGM Agenda, and the directly elected (by Members) majority of members of the main Committee has been first undermined and now effectively abolished. The Committee has never considered Member-approved Resolutions to be binding

Most importantly, on 1 July 2013 the MCC became a Royal Charter Corporation with Lord's Cricket Ground in the proprietorship of the Membership. Conceivably, with a suitable SGM Resolution majority, Members may now decide to profit from the sale of Lord's – in direct contravention of the original terms of the purchase of the Ground. This reality is enshrined in Article 14 of the Royal Charter. It was made possible by a change in the Club Rules in the 1980s at a time when the Trustees could still veto any sale. Since then, the Trustee power to prevent the sale of Lord's has been abolished.

Suppressing Dissent

Over the years the MCC Committee has closed one door after another to avoid Member dissent or dissatisfaction causing any unwelcome (to the Committee) upheaval. Now, even e-mail correspondence raising matters of concern often remains unanswered.

This unhealthy trend began with Rule changes designed to remove the ability of Members to raise matters for discussion at an AGM by allowing a Proposer and Secunder present at the meeting to speak to a formal Resolution that could be subjected to a binding poll. Instead, to get a Resolution passed at an AGM or SGM, it is now necessary for 120/180 Members to sign a form in advance of a Resolution being submitted. The wording of any Resolution has to be approved by the Committee

Such Resolutions are then subject to vetting by the Club Lawyer and/or an external Law Firm in order to decide on their "legality" under the Rules. Frequently, such Resolutions are ruled out of order on obscure technical grounds through this process. Even if they do reach the AGM/SGM Agenda, the use of the remote or postal vote backed by a Committee recommendation on how it wishes Members to vote will invariably decide the matter against the proposers in the absence of any discussion.

The 2021 MCC AGM Report and Accounts contained a Committee recommendation, ahead of any debate at the time of the meeting, for Members to reject a minor voting change proposed by an "Ordinary" Member through a Special Resolution Agenda item. It was a foregone conclusion that the Committee voting wish would be confirmed.

The misuse of the remote/postal voting procedures to ward off "grass roots" initiatives from Members, coupled with the continued erosion of Member rights through regular Club Rule changes, has effectively neutralized all Member opposition to the way the Committee of the day runs the Club.

Individual Committee members are protected from scrutiny by confidentiality clauses and minimal information is allowed about candidates standing for election to the Committee. Instead, the Chairman of the Committee has taken it upon himself to write letters to Members at the time of the voting making it clear who he wishes to see “elected.”

Emergence of an Executive Club Chairman

Following the disastrous 1999 AGM, a Working Party headed by Sir Michael Jenkins was set up to look into a restructuring of the Club and the President appointed a Members’ Liaison Group. The Jenkins Report subsequently proposed the creation of the position of Club Chairman who would act in a non-executive capacity by chairing Committee meetings in line with a new Rule 13. Jenkins became the first Club Chairman, only to resign one year later. The Secretary MCC was to enjoy an embellished title of Chief Executive.

Personalities have always mattered at Lord’s going back to the earliest days of MCC. Many of those involved first developed prowess on the cricket field before branching into cricket administration. Latterly, a succession of non-cricketers has been selected to head up the Club on the basis of their supposed commercial or corporate skills.

The result has been that over the past 20 years various Chairmen have gradually developed the role and boosted their importance and influence over Club affairs. Today the role of Club Chairman is, in all but name, a wide-ranging, unelected, unpaid executive position that is nowhere defined in the Club Rules. This is another unwelcome abuse of power that has undercut the role of the Chief Executive and seen further erosion of Member rights. The Committee continues to govern everyday affairs without demur.

Attempts at Reform

In 1984 a Special Working Party recommended a root-and-branch structure review of the Club’s committee system. It found *“too many sub-committees (then numbering eight) involved in too many meetings, which create an enormous amount of work at considerable expense”*.

Since then, at least ten more Working Parties (including the Jenkins WP) have been appointed to recommend reforms, usually because of Member unrest at AGM’s. Subsequent WP recommendations have never been accepted without Committee interference or being properly implemented. Many of these WP

Reports have not been shared with Members. Worse still, WP's have been dismissed without reporting their findings at all. Instead, the Committee has usually preferred to ignore any suggestions that it believes will diminish its role or powers.

A good example is the 2002 Scott Baker Working Party that followed the Jenkins report. This recommended a Members' Charter coupled with a clarification of the duties and responsibilities of the Club Trustees. Neither task has ever been spelled out or executed.

In 2003 the matter of MCC Incorporation became a Member concern. It took another decade to implement the necessary change with the Committee appointing an Incorporation and Structure Working Party (ISWP) in 2011 to advise on governance and restructuring the Club. The MCC became a Royal Charter Company two years later and the necessary restructuring of the Club management remains unfulfilled.

The ISWP Report 2013-2015

The ISWP's work was split into two parts. The first, to recommend the best method of incorporation and the second to plan the necessary re-structuring and governance reforms that would have to follow incorporation. Part 1 was accomplished with the minimum fuss and a Royal Charter was granted on 1 July 2013. However, another seven years went by before Lord's Cricket Ground finally appeared in the Land Register in December 2020.

Part 2 proved to be contentious. In 2014 Derek Brewer, at the time the Club's Secretary and Chief Executive, wrote a paper for the ISWP that contained a coruscating indictment of the manner in which the MCC was governed and managed. He stated that the Club was "dysfunctional."

By then the Committee had appointed a large number of unelected members of various specialist sub-committees. These sub-committees had quasi-executive powers and committee privileges. Combined with a main Committee of 24 members, of whom 12 were elected directly by Members, the total count of those "running" the MCC through this system has risen to around 170 – nearly 1% of the total Club Membership.

In tandem with this unwieldy structure, a Secretariat consisting at the top a Secretary/Chief Executive, the Deputy-Secretary and four Assistant-Secretaries carry out (but do not decide) the Club's commercial activities. Collectively, this secretarial team (including additional administrators) receives more than £2

million in salary income each year. External costs include considerable consultancy and legal advice in most years.

Contradictions abound with this unwieldy set-up. A Finance sub-committee of 12 Members, most unelected, plus a Club Treasurer and an Assistant Secretary (Finance) advise the main Committee on commercial affairs. An Estates sub-Committee of 13 and an Assistant Secretary oversee property matters. There is also an Assistant-Secretary (Legal) but no Company Secretary and various other minor sub-committees.

The evolutionary reform of governance recommended by the ISWP in 2015, with 27 specific changes proposed, has never been implemented. A harbinger of things to come appeared at the March 2015 meeting of the ISWP when the Chairman Designate announced he strongly disapproved of the proposal to introduce a directly elected Member's Committee. This "second chamber," he claimed, would undermine the authority of the main Committee despite it being bound to report to the main Committee. What is wrong with a Court of Appeal?

An ISWP recommendation to reduce the size of the Committee had already been accepted in October 2014. Under the new Chairman, the Committee ignored this vote and later formally rejected it. Even modest and long-overdue reforms, such as appraisals of Committee members' performance during their term in office and greater clarity around the roles of the President and the Trustees, were rubbish. The ISWP Report Part 2 was never subjected to a formal Member vote.

The Club Trustees – the Club Conscience

The Club Rules of 1867 decreed that not more than five and not less than three MCC Members be appointed Trustees for life at any one time. Their authority was to be significant since they were designated Principal Officers of the Club, ex-officio voting members of the MCC Committee and enjoyed a lifetime appointment. In effect, they became a "counsel of wise owls" charged with the responsibility of ensuring the Club was properly governed. New Trustee appointments remained within the gift of the Trustees themselves and the Club archives contain eight Trustee Death Certificates from this early period.

Soon after WWII the Trustee role was significantly diluted with the Committee taking over their appointment for three-year terms. Since then all the Trustee duties and responsibilities have been gradually stripped away (probably unlawfully). First came a reduction in their numbers to four in 1951 and to three in 1964, so losing two Committee votes. Second, they ceased to be Principal

Officers of the Club. Third, their Committee votes were removed and they could only attend Committee meetings as observers. Today the Trustees are mere eunuchs - ex-Committee members/chums of respective Chairmen appointed for 3/6 years, enjoying various Committee privileges as part of a long-service medal award.

Perhaps the greatest and most significant loss, however, are the Trustee powers of a final veto of any sale of Lord's and Ground development plans.

A Deed executed on 31 August 1937 with the appointment of a Custodian Trustee identified their continued management responsibilities under the Public Trustee Act 1906. Their role was subsequently confirmed as recently as April 2003 by the law firm Farrer & Co. in a Consultancy Report submitted to the Committee. This raises the issue of a possible breach of a Lord's Ground Trust. Why did the Trustees not intervene in the row over the use of Lord's by the TCCB in 1987? Why is there no Trustee veto to prevent expensive development at Lord's in the absence of any long term contract for the future use of Lord's by the ECB with an agreed income stream to fund the capital investment?

Financial mismanagement

Many of the Club's current difficulties (Covid aside) stem from bad financial decisions, most of which are cloaked in mystery. As far back as 1969 MCC finances were in a parlous state. Since then, an increasingly desperate search for new revenue sources has ensued, while £ millions have been lost on foolhardy ventures or shortsightedness. How can this be with the Club owning one of the most valuable pieces of real estate in the world?

Repeated signs of gross mismanagement of Club funds have appeared with failed development plans, overspending on development (the Media Centre), irregular "investments", and missed commercial opportunities. It is no exaggeration to say that many £ millions have been wasted – for example, on the failed "Vision for Lord's" project including the Nursery End Development and the South West (Tavern & Allen stands) redevelopment. Another £4 million was written off on the purchase price paid for 6 Grove End Road. Consultancy fees have soared.

Most costly of all, in 1999 the Club failed to purchase the tunnels under the Nursery Ground leading to a costly and divisive struggle with a property developer. It was as plain as a pikestaff that no third party should ever have been allowed to outbid the Club at auction (see below – Tunnel Vision).

Meantime, annual subscriptions to the Club have grown year-on-year. Many sales of Life Memberships and Debentures, accompanied by the denial of basic Member rights and privileges at Lord's due to the Club's subservient relationship with ECB during the 2019 ODI World Cup, have all indicated financial stress. Most recently, in 2019 MCC failed to put in place the necessary insurance precautions to provide against loss of business income from Covid restrictions, similar to those arrangements made by the Jockey Club and the All-England Tennis Club amongst many other sporting bodies. More avoidable losses have ensued. One reason for this debacle may have been the Club's undeclared financial relationship, through the ECB and the latter's control of, an offshore captive insurance business Registered in Guernsey as Reigndei Ltd.

The Club Accounts

At the 2014 AGM Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC) were approved as the MCC Royal Charter Co. Auditors for the following year. However, the Accounts for the year ending 2015 were audited by KPMG. Two years later the KPMG Audit Report Certified "We have audited the non-statutory accounts of the MCC for the year ending 31st December 2016in accordance with our engagement letter dated 20th February 2018". For the year ending 31st December 2018 the Accounts contain a reference to the same engagement letter dated 20th February 2018.

The details of the captive insurance business Reigndei Ltd. (Guernsey), in which the Club bought originally 30,000 £1 Ordinary shares for £28,500, have never been disclosed to Members. The clandestine offshore activities associated with Reigndei Ltd. (Guernsey) would seem inappropriate and worthy of a full investigation to ensure that any suspicion of fraud can be eliminated. How can the MCC Annual Accounts audited by KPMG, be Certified as free from fraud or error when Member questions concerning the non-disclosure of a Shareholding in a shady offshore Company in Guernsey remain unanswered by both the EWCB Ltd. (ECB) and the MCC (A Royal Charter Co.)?

Reigndei Ltd was created in 1993 by the TCCB to provide "pluvial insurance cover" for the 18 FCC's, the MCC and the NCCA. A total of 585,000 Shares (£1) were issued partly paid @95p each. The MCC is recorded as the owner of 30,000 Ordinary Shares. Soon afterwards all of the Reigndei Ltd. £1 Ordinary Shares were placed in the ownership of a Company Registered at Companies House as "Derbeyork Trustee Company Ltd." (02774287). Dennis Silk, Past President MCC and ex-Chairman TCCB, became one of the three Trustees.

The ECB Annual Audited Accounts disclose every year the “premiums” and “claims” made and paid on behalf of all the Shareholders. In April 2015 the ECB CEO Tom Harrison became a Director of Derbyork Trustee Company Ltd. and the following year he became the Person with Significant Control (PSC). The Company was dissolved in 2018 without notice. The ECB is now claiming ownership of all the Reigndei Ltd Ordinary Shares.

KPMG are the appointed Auditors of both the ECB and MCC Certified Accounts. How is it therefore KPMG have failed to link the two sets of Accounts with a full disclosure of the Reigndei Ltd, activities? Both Kent and Sussex County Cricket Clubs disclose in their Audited Annual Accounts their 30,000 £1 Ordinary Shares in Reigndei Ltd. are of “Nil value”. This, despite an analysis of all ‘Claims’ and “Premiums” disclosed in the ECB Annual A/c’s dating back to 1997 suggest a credit balance of c £14.5 million (value £24 per Share). This balance includes an exceptional item of £5.5 million made in 2008 for bad weather claims.

The ECB is obliged to supply copies of the Reigndei Ltd Annual Audited Accounts to all Shareholders including the MCC. Both the MCC and ECB refuse to disclose any information concerning Reigndei Ltd. Audited Annual Accounts and the ownership of the 585,000 Ordinary Shares no longer being held in Trust on behalf of the 18 FCC’s, the MCC and the NCCA by the defunct Derbyork Trustee Company Ltd,

The Disappearance of the Appearance of Accountability

The final destruction of any vestige of Member influence and democracy at Lord’s took place in 2020. At a “virtual” AGM followed by an enshrining SGM, radical changes to the Club Rules were voted through using the postal/remote voting system.

From 2021 no “Ordinary” Member supported by a Proposer and Seconder may stand for election to the main Committee without being vetted in advance and approved by a “Nom Co” controlled by the Club Chairman and applying subjective “skill set” qualifications determined personally – so overturning about 150 years of any vestigial democracy remaining within the Club.

Through the creation of this Nom Co system (which ignores the surfeit of skillsets that already exist through the sub-committee structure and the professional staff), a structure has been put in place that entrenches the control of the Club Chairman over the entire affairs of MCC for an indefinite future.

These latest changes highlight 2020-21 as the start of an autocracy at the MCC led by a Club Chairman supported by the equivalent of a cabal or, perhaps more appropriately today, a CELL composed of four individuals whose surnames begin with the letters C, E, L and L.

Tunnel Vision

The auction of the Land at the Nursery End on 9th December 1999 proved a case of history repeating itself. Failing to buy Lord's Ground at auction in 1860 was costly enough - who can predict the eventual cost of this catastrophic Committee blunder to the MCC Members, who as usual, will be left to pay the bill?

The following e-mail was sent to Tony Lewis, the MCC President:-

"Sent 13/12/99 @ 10.34pm by Nigel Knott

Dear Tony,

Following my e-mail sent to you on 29th November 1999 you kindly asked Michael Blow to contact me direct. I made it clear to him the land being sold by Railtrack should be purchased at any price as it had to be worth more to the Club than any outside interest. It was my expressed view that a TOP CLASS professional should be employed and briefed on the Club's behalf to purchase at any price. It seems incredible to me the Committee had put a price on this priceless piece of land equal to the glass and plastic abortion that now stands upon it. Just mark my words – nothing but trouble lies ahead with an outsider having bought a significant interest within our walls. The Committee's extraordinary valuation beggars belief, I did say to you that £5 million might have to be paid. In these circumstances commercial valuations are irrelevant when our control over the WHOLE ground is of paramount importance. I do not know what the Membership will say but you can expect more ructions for a certainty. I do not speak with hindsight but think the Committee has made yet another blunder of Titanic proportions with perhaps the most serious implications yet. I have spoken to Robert Griffiths this evening and he tells me he is on record as expressing an identical view to mine at the last Estates sub-Committee meeting – is nobody listening? He tells me also that nobody told him of the outcome of the Auction until we spoke earlier this evening. Perhaps nobody dares to face the music! Whoever has bought this land must be rubbing their hands with glee – the fact they have outbid us tells me we have missed a pretty big trick here. Will anyone be called to account? Sincerely, Nigel."

As is usual no formal enquiry has ever been executed and the Members continue to pay a heavy price for what could be viewed as negligence. A highly placed "revolving door" Member told me later on "the Committee will do everything to prevent the Purchaser from profiting from his actions". Hence further £ millions being wasted on the cancelled Master Plan Development. A

hotel at the Nursery End was first mooted in the 1970's and 50 years later this important facility has never been built. Instead, Members have to forbear the Offices built for the ECB.

John Reason, the Sunday Telegraph Sports Correspondent once told me the MCC was one of the most powerful establishments in the world that could never be penetrated by an "outsider". Michael Melliush, a Committee member and Trustee, promised "Nigel I will ensure you will never become a Committee member"! I should have taken more notice.

What is the Future for Lord's?

It is my personal view that Lord's is Cricket and must always be so. My mission for the MCC as the perpetual owner of Lord's, is to provide the finest facilities in the world in which our representative England Teams play Test Match or International One-Day Cricket in front of an audience at Lord's Ground itself or viewed alternatively on free-to-air broadcasting facilities from Lord's.

Until May 1987 and the historic Bicentenary AGM, I took little interest in the Club administration and management. After this historic meeting I realized that all was not well within our Club. With conflicts of interest rife, and the Test and County Cricket Board calling the shots, it became obvious to me that the best interests of the MCC Members and our commercial rights and privileges at Lord's were being traduced.

Now, with the English Cricket Board (ECB) firmly in the driving seat at Lord's and the MCC adopting a sycophantic stance for fear of losing two Test Matches a year at "the home of cricket" and precious income to boot, the future for the Club is bleak. Transparency and accountability in Club affairs has become non-existent.

A Solution

Richard Bramwell QC, a Tax Lawyer has supplied a rather obvious solution to the conundrum of Ground ownership. In the absence of Lord's being held in Trust for the MCC by the Club Trustees (requiring a formal investigation to ascertain their purpose), he has suggested that Lord's Cricket Ground be made the subject of a separate Company enjoying a 999-year lease on a peppercorn rent from the Club.

This fits in with my belief, formed through membership of many Working Parties (1992-2015), that the Club and Lord's Cricket Ground should be split

into two separate entities - the present Club committee system looking after Membership matters and Lord's Ground being controlled by a team of well-qualified professionals, experienced in commercial affairs and endowed with the necessary powers by the Committee for making the necessary annual profits to sustain the future of the Club. This arrangement demands a clear separation of powers that would put an end to the "revolving door" establishment being responsible for the "entire management" of everything that happens at Lord's

A determined and committed drive to make the governance of MCC more democratic, accountable and transparent should go hand-in-hand with radical structural change. The pernicious Nom Co should be jettisoned, the sub-committee system simplified, a democratically elected Members' Committee given wider authority over Member affairs and a main, smaller Committee authorized by changes to the Club Rules to act as an accountable oversight Board of Directors.

A Royal Charter Company embracing peerless standards of good governance, with the Mission Statement of RA Fitzgerald remaining extant today, coupled with Sir Scott Baker's MCC Charter protecting Member rights and privileges at Lord's, and a Cricket Constitution governing the activities of the ECB, would be really purposeful.

Dr. Nigel J Knott
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Postscript

An archive of Club history and current affairs can be accessed at www.mccmembers.co.uk

MCC – A CLUB WITHOUT A PURPOSE

Poor decision-making

A series of avoidable losses

Decades of mismanagement

A complete absence of good government

An incestuous relationship with the ECB

Lack of accountability, transparency and democracy

Nigel Knott was an MCC Playing Member, elected in 1966. Highgate School First XI. Represented the Army, Combined Services and W Malaysia. Captain Guy's Hospital CC and represented United Hospitals. Played on several occasions at Lord's and the Oval. Featured in MCC Best Performance List as a Candidate.

In addition has served on six Committee Working Parties:

1) Lord Griffith WP - The Administration of English Cricket

2) Lord's Staging Agreement WP

3) President's WP - Members' Liaison Group

4) Big Match Broadcasting on Free to Air TV WP

5) CEO Incorporation WP

6) Incorporation (Royal Charter) and Structure WP (ISWP)