

The Great Garden Gnome Heist

Author's Note: The seeds of The Great Gnome Heist of September 1994 were sown at the club committee meeting of July 2 of that year. We reproduce the minutes of that fateful meeting, verbatim, from A Spon's diary. Subsequent entries reveal the unfolding of this dramatic series of events.

Committee Meeting

No 154 Held at Sedgemoor Bowling Club

2 July 1994

Present:

Councillor: Frentham-Hoare *President*

G Frenzi: *Publicity Sec*

A Stensch: *Treasurer*

J Beltup: *Forward Planning*

A Spon: *Hon Sec*

Major van Trompe: *Research and Library*

L von Scheisserhosen: *Membership*

Apologies L Tardi: *Meeting Convener*

Meeting commenced at 20.00 hrs

1 Minutes of the Previous Meeting — Approved

2 Leak in Tea Urn — Smart detective work by G Frenzi revealed that the previous users of the urn were the Sedgemoor Philatelic society. Mrs Frentham-Hoare undertook to ask the philatelists to effect a repair at their expense.

3 Major van Trompe's 97th birthday — A bottle of malt whisky was Presented to the club's venerable librarian together with an attractive card expressing congratulations and thanks for his years of dedication to the gnomonic cause.

4 Forthcoming Events — J Beltup requested members to diarise the following:

19 Sept L Tardi will give a slide talk on his recent visit to SE England entitled *Gnomes and decorative Garden Accoutrements of the Kentish Seaside Resorts*.

Nov 21 The James Thrupp Memorial Lecture. Subject: *Anthropic Mimicry: the Garden Gnome in a Bourgeois Post-industrial Milieu*. Speaker: Alec Pugh, visiting professor of Social Anthropology at UCT

Dec 13 In conjunction with the *Embrace the Earth Society*, a talk will be delivered by the well-known *fenshuai* practitioner, Ka Aa. Her subject will be *Gnomonic vibrations- a neglected dimension in the holistic energies of*

garden furniture orientation.

6 New Members An application was received (via J Beltup) from a Mr W Kaarvup of *Chippe & Kaarvup* monumental masons of Athlone. A heated debate was sparked off by A Stensch who pointed out that this firm was a supplier of garden gnomes and that there could be a conflict of interests. Peace was restored by our lady chairman who, showing her consummate political nous, proposed that Mr Kaarvup be admitted as “corporate” member without voting rights. Motion passed with one abstention.

7 General — L von Scheisserhosen said that, while membership stood at a healthy 35, all — with the exception of our charming lady chairman — were male, white and over forty. It was agreed that a concerted effort would be made to recruit members of alternative gender and cultural persuasions.

Meeting concluded at 20.45 and members repaired to the bar.

3 July. Have just finished the minutes of yesterday’s meeting (see above). As always, and bearing in mind the mental capacity of Beltup who has the IQ of a tapeworm, I have kept the language simple. I have, however, permitted myself a modest literary flourish in my use of the unusual word “nous” (see item 5).

Much is said at committee meetings that is best left UNRECORDED — which is where my natural sense of diplomacy stands me in good stead. It would never have done, for example, to record that the abstaining voter (item 6) was the major who was sound asleep, having made substantial inroads into the bottle of whisky during his frequent visits to the toilet.

Beltup can be a real EMBARRASSMENT. For example, when the repair of the tea urn by the Philatelic society (item 2) was being discussed he said in that dreadful cockney accent of his:

“Ask ‘em to stick a stamp on it.”

From the chuckle that ran round the committee table, it was clear that the members shared my opinion of this impractical suggestion.

And again, the reference to “our charming lady president” (item 6) evoked from Beltup (not so sotto voce): “She’s about as charming as a monitor lizard.”

This remark revealed Beltup’s TOTAL LACK OF BREEDING — though I would privately admit to the lady’s remarkable resemblance to that singular reptile. The matter was again touched on by von Scheisserhosen over the rim of his post-meeting glass of beer when he muttered:

“I zink she vud not do much business in zer profession suggested to her name.”

I have no idea what he meant.

18 July. Last night’s **club meeting** was enlivened by the presence of our new member W Kaarvup who introduced a novel solution to that most vexing

problem of the gnome owner: the roving dog. Kaarvup produced an aerosol spray merchandised under the odd label: Fido-OFF. (Inexplicably this name caused great hilarity among the members.) “Gentlemen,” he claimed, “this product is guaranteed to repel any life form within 100 metres.”

He proved his point by spraying it against a table leg. This set off the smoke alarm, and in the rush to leave the room, Major van Trompe, who was returning from the toilet, was bowled over. To our dismay he did not get up and appeared to have stopped breathing. Frenzi rushed out to the bowling green to return with medical help in the shape of Mrs Pusch, a local midwife. She applied the “kiss of life” and soon had the major back on his feet. Those of us who were familiar with the major’s drinking habits were not surprised to observe a slight stagger in the lady’s gait as she left the room.

Kaarvup received orders for 21 cans of Fido-OFF at R98,00 per can.

Extract from the committee minutes of 6 August:

5 New Members An application (seconded by Councillor Frenzieugh-Hoare) was received from a Ms Letty Crunch and Ms Charmaine Hendrikse.

Passed unanimously.

6 General — J Beltup produced an exquisite miniature Lithuanian Prancing Elf mounted on an electrically-driven revolving plinth. It had, he revealed, been donated by W Kaarvup as a trophy. He suggested that an annual garden gnome competition be held. He further proposed that this should be held in front gardens to enable the maximum press coverage for the club. It was agreed that the competition be held in two months time subject to members’ approval.

A Spon proposed that the competition be expanded to include garden accoutrements such as decorative post boxes. This motion failed to enlist a seconder.

Note: There was some dissension on item 6. L Tardi reminded members of the anti-gnome activism of 1971. “I have no wish to become the target of the derision of radical anti-gnomists” he said.

At this point Major van Trompe, (what a grand old warrior he is) rose to his feet:

“Fellow gnomists,” he thundered, “it is time to leave the past behind and move forward together into the future. There is a new wind blowing through Sedgemoor. It’s time to come out of the closet and nail our colours to the mast. I second this courageous proposal.” The old boy then subsided, exhausted, into his chair before leaving to answer a call of nature.

On the subject of my own motion: I despair of the conservatism of my fellow members. Sedgemoor boasts a RICH HERITAGE of decorative postbox

designs. In my own garden, for example, dwells a white plaster cherub holding aloft a small barrel slotted to receive mail. The charming little fellow might have been plucked from the ceiling of the Cistine Chapel. But for sheer originality it would be hard to beat my neighbour's giant slotted golf ball. Astonishingly it is mounted on a chain that spirals upwards from the ground apparently DEFYING GRAVITY. A closer examination reveals that the owner has welded the links together. (Isn't that clever?).

19 Sept. Last night's **club meeting** was a huge success. L Tardi delivered a splendid lecture on his recent gnome-spotting visit to visit to SE England.

He showed a number of superb slides which drew gasps of admiration from the assembled company.

Further zest was added by the presence of our new lady members.

Ms Letty Crunch turned out to be a sturdily-built person with a forthright manner. She was dressed, surprisingly, in an old maroon tracksuit the back of which bore the legend: *POTCH UNI Ladies Wrestling 1972*

I was impressed by her handshake which was extremely firm for a lady. Her companion Ms Charmaine Hendrikse was, by contrast, a petite and somewhat timid coloured lady who I would estimate to be some twenty years her junior. Throughout the meeting they sat holding hands. It is wonderful to see such friendship in these materialistic days.

28 Sept. DISASTER STRIKES. During the small hours of this morning the entire assemblage of gnomes, displayed throughout Sedgemoor and surrounding suburbs for tomorrow's competition, was stolen. The only witness was a Mrs van Schalkwyk who, while admitting her cat at 2.30 am, noticed a small truck parked outside the house of L Tardi who lives opposite. It was a moonless night but she was able to discern two shadowy figures getting into the cab before driving off at slow speed. She noticed that the right rear light of the truck was flickering as it pulled away. The police were informed and of course the competition had to be cancelled.

29 Sept. Today the Cape Times emblazoned the story across its front page: *Anti-Gnome Activists Strike in Sedgemoor?*

In a devastating blow to local gnome fanciers, scores of garden gnomes were filched from Sedgemoor gardens in a pre-dawn heist. Several valuable specimens have disappeared — including a rare antique wooden troll from Norway, belonging to Councillor Frentham-Hoare. Inspector Xoka Xola of the Roodwood Police stated that he was baffled.

2 Oct. Extract from the minutes of yesterday's committee meeting:

3 J Beltup conveyed a generous offer by W Kaarvup to replace the stolen gnomes at a special price from a consignment expected shortly from a

prestigious Korean manufacturer. This offer to be promulgated at the next club meeting.

17 Oct. At yesterday's **club meeting** W Kaarvup took provisional orders for 58 gnomes at R250 each.

28 Oct. DENOUEMENT! At 1.30am Friday morning Major van Trompe, returning from his weekly poker game in Paarl, stopped off at a deserted all-night service station on the N1 highway to answer a call of nature. On emerging from the toilet he noticed a small truck standing on the driveway with its engine running. As he watched a car drew up alongside. The driver wound down his window to receive an envelope that was handed to him through the truck's passenger window. As the car drove off he observed that the driver was none other than Beltup. A minute later the truck set off in the same direction. The major noted that its right rear light was flickering!.

For all his advanced years the major is far from senile. He immediately set out in pursuit. He soon overtook the vehicle and, though unable to discern the driver's face, he got a good look at the sign on the door of the cab. It read:

CHIPPE & KAARVUP Monumental Masons.

Minutes of the Extraordinary General Meeting of Nov 30

- 1 Address by police representative Detective Inspector XokaXola of the Roodwood Police announced that, following information received, the missing gnomes had been located in the yard of the Stellenbosch branch of Chippe & Kaarvup. The miscreants having confessed to the theft, it would not be necessary to hold the articles as evidence. Mr Kaarvup had agreed to return the gnomes to the parking lot of the bowling club where they could be collected by their owners.
- 2 Resignation A Spon announced that he had received a letter of resignation from J Beltup. Accepted with alacrity.
- 3 General G Frenzi pointed out that there was time for members to reclaim their exhibits and re-enter the competition which will now take place on Dec 15. A Stensch proposed a vote of thanks to Major van Trompe. (Seconded by A Spon) . This was duly delivered, amid cheers, on the major's return from the toilet.

Note my use of the unusual word "miscreants" (item 1) instead of the vulgar "villains" or the over-used "perpetrators". Nice touch don't you think.

Al Todd