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THE 'LINKS' VIEWED FROM THE EXTENDED CLUBHOUSE WITH YOUNG TREES

I have been acquainted with Stockport Golf Club for many years but, in truth, I was really only acquainted with its golf course and not with the club itself. However, in the process of writing a book of this kind one really does get to know a club from the inside out. Stockport have been very helpful in allowing me full access to all their documents and records. They tell the story of the club, its successes and even its failures, and it is remarkably generous of the club to grant me, an outsider who is not a member of the club, the opportunity to study all its documents, even those which might be considered sensitive.



INTRODUCTION

What has made the task particularly fascinating is that while researching and writing this book I have also been engaged on similar books for The Alwoodley Golf Club on the northern edge of Leeds and Hartlepool Golf Club on the coast of County Durham. The three clubs could hardly be more different: the nature of their courses, their management structures, their ethos, the problems they have faced and the solutions they have found to those problems. But there are several key features they all share. Each club was founded by a group of men with real vision. They knew precisely what sort of golf club they were founding. Their legacy was such that those who have had the responsibility of running these clubs in the hundred years since their foundation have been able to draw on that vision in maintaining the nature of their clubs. Were George Orme to walk into the Stockport clubhouse tomorrow he would immediately feel at home. I, too, feel at home at Stockport, but for a different reason. I have met many members during my frequent visits to the Torkington clubhouse. I have always been warmly welcomed. Captains, Vice-Captains, Presidents, Honorary Secretary, Honorary Treasurer and committee members have accepted my presence in their club with a smile. My occasional forays onto the course have brought me into contact with greens staff who have always found time for a friendly word or two, despite their busy schedule keeping the course in the fabulous condition for which it is noted. A friendly wave from Mike Peel or his assistants as I passed the professional's shop

has brightened some very damp days in darkest winter. I have neither hungered nor thirsted, for Paul Hill and his staff have regularly plied me with pots of tea and coffee, finding me even when I have been secreted away in the remotest corner of the clubhouse with my computer and a daunting pile of minute books. And I can vouch for the fact that the Stockport hot beef sandwich is the best there is. It would not have been possible to write this book without the tireless support of Ken Dargie and Liz White. Ken has willingly checked the most obscure facts, provided me with abundant research material and kept my spirits up when trying to unravel some of the more convoluted episodes in the club's history. Liz has, despite her own demanding workload, found time to search out missing volumes of minutes, photocopy anything and everything, print off draft after draft of text and even to show me the shortcut through the ladies' locker room – the ladies were not there at the time! And then there is Steve James. That this book looks like no other centenary book is entirely due to his design, typographic skills and vivid imagination. It has been an inspiration to work with him. My fingers are crossed that the members of Stockport will recognise their own club within these pages. I very much hope that those readers who are not members of Stockport will feel that they might like to get to know the club a little better. It is worth getting to know.

Mark Rowlinson Wilmslow December 2006

Stockport Golf Club



THE 5TH GREEN ON AN ALMOST TREELESS 'LINKS' CIRCA 1924

...is one of fifty-one golf clubs throughout the British Isles celebrating its centenary in 2005. While it would be quite invidious to attempt to rate these in the manner of the popular golfing press, it is perfectly truthful to state that Stockport is one of the pick of that year's crop. But comparison with clubs and courses founded in 1905 in the further reaches of Great Britain and Ireland is largely irrelevant to the beginnings of Stockport, simply because travel and transport were so very different in 1905 from what they are a hundred years later. True, a number of golfers made the pilgrimage to St Andrews or Muirfield but, otherwise, golf tourism was then hardly, if at all, known in Britain. What is relevant to Stockport's foundation is what already existed in the immediate vicinity.

Cheshire had a healthy number of extant clubs and courses by 1905. The leader by a considerable margin was the Royal Liverpool club at Hoylake which was founded in 1869, making it the second oldest links course in England after Westward Ho! Hoylake's standing was then, as it is today, of the highest order and it had already hosted the Open Championships of 1897 and 1902. Other Cheshire clubs soon followed Hoylake, including a number inland, far away both in distance and style from the traditional links:

Cheadle 1885, Disley 1889, Macclesfield 1889, Wilmslow 1889, Knutsford 1891,
 Leasowe 1891, Wallasey 1891, Heaton Moor 1892, Marple 1892,
 Timperley – *now Altrincham Municipal* 1893, Bramall Park 1894, Mellor and Townscliffe 1894,
 Wirral Ladies' 1894, Sandbach 1895, Ashton-on-Mersey 1897, Romiley 1897, Congleton 1898,
 Chester 1901, Helsby 1901, Stamford 1901, Heswall 1902, Bromborough 1903,
 Hale 1903 and Warrington 1903.

For the record, there was also a club at Frodsham from the 1870s until 1924, today's club being a comparative youngster, dating from 1990.

It is immediately apparent that, apart from Bramall Park, Cheadle and Heaton Moor, those clubs and courses conveniently located for potential golfers living to the south and east of Stockport were on high ground: Disley, Marple, Mellor, and perhaps Romiley. The magnificent views enjoyed on these courses notwithstanding, there were a number of disadvantages, as related in an account of the formation of the club by one of its founders – its most important founder – George Orme.

(TWO)

PLAYING FROM THE 1ST TEE IN THE 1920S – NOTE CADDIES AND MEMBERS



(THREE)

'I cannot pretend to remember all the matters of importance that occurred during the early life of the Club or to guarantee that what I do remember is accurate, as it is now about 45 years since the Club was first formed, but I am jotting down such matters as I can remember, and trust that my memory is not greatly at fault.

I was a member of the Disley Golf Club and much enjoyed the golf there and my association with the members of the Club but the stone walls on the course and the fact that the Club rented the land from a farmer who restricted our activities in improving the course, very much detracted from the pleasures of the links.

The idea occurred to me to start a links in the vicinity of Stockport, where I was living at the time, which would be quite independent of a farmer and the land should be on a long lease so as to make it worth while to spend money on laying out the links, or should be purchased outright.

I called a meeting of my golfing friends whom I thought would be interested, and as a result a Club was formed (unincorporated) called the Davenport Golf Club, and as a temporary matter a plot of land at Woodsmoor was secured (on an annual tenancy) and a nine hole course was made.

I cannot remember who attended the first meeting, but I think it most likely that the following attended as they were on the first Committee of the Stockport Golf Club at Torkington to which we moved in about two years. Besides myself there were Messrs. Robert Hyde, Frank Robinson, WN Battersby, Arthur Briggs, AE Daniels, Wm Johnston, FOS Leak, John Langson and I Howie Smith. These were all friends of mine and all were most active in promoting the club and fixing up the ground.

We purchased a wood pavilion from Messrs. Boulton and Paul, and although small, it did us good service.



THE ORIGINAL CLUBHOUSE AT WOODSMOOR

(FOUR)

I think, but I am not quite certain, that Peter Barrie was with us at Davenport prior to moving to Torkington. I may mention a peculiarity about the wood clubs that Barrie played with. They had very large heads, and I asked him why they were so large, and his reply was 'Wood drives better than lead.

The Davenport course was made famous by a ball being driven over the railway, hitting a locomotive and bouncing on to the course again. I only learned a short time ago that Mr Worrall had played the ball.'

It has been necessary to quote extensively from Orme's account – there is more, but that relates to later years – because, most unfortunately, the club's earliest minute book cannot be found. Orme himself warned that what he remembered may not be wholly accurate, so, for the record Peter Barrie was indeed the Professional and Greenkeeper at the Woodsmoor course and that he not only played with large wooden clubs but he also made them himself.

All the original committee members were members of Disley Golf Club. Orme and many of the early golf club members also belonged to the Davenport Club, a business men's social club at Cale Green, still in existence today. Committee meetings took place there and the golf club was effectively run from there until 1912. Davenport Golf Club was instituted in December 1905 and golf began to be played at Woodsmoor early the following year. Certainly the full nine holes were in play by that summer, according to an account of the opening of the new pavilion, carried in the Stockport Advertiser of July 20th 1906. It mentions that the nine holes, played twice, were equal to a distance of three miles. The course was popular with members – there were 75 original members and that number doubled in two years – and it was noted that two nights 'are devoted to ladies, of whom there is a goodly number.'

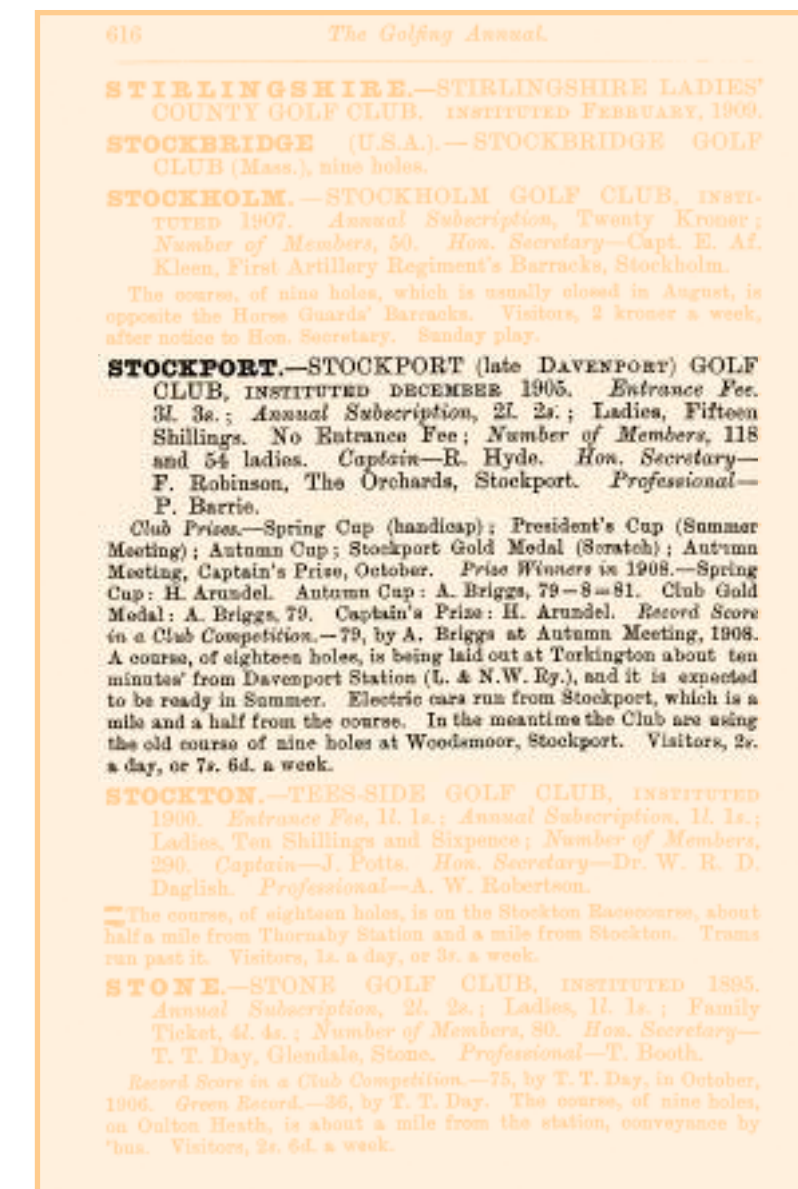
George Orme, Captain of the club, opened the pavilion in the absence, through illness, of the President, Henry Bell. It should be noted that in these early days the role of president appears to have been senior to the captain in many respects. Orme said that the new club would meet a long felt need in the area and he hoped that the games to be played there would 'add to their years and to their pleasure.' An exhibition match followed between two Disley players, Israel Sidebottom and Jessie Taylor, the former would in due course become a prominent Stockport member. George Orme recorded how fortunate they were to secure the presence of

two such prominent players who would give them an exhibition of golf and set a record for the 'links' which members might then endeavour to improve. The pair played the nine holes twice and on the first time round Sidebottom set a new course record of 41 (against a bogey of 40). Taylor fared rather worse, coming to grief when he hit his ball into a hedge. On the second round Taylor did better, scoring 42 to Sidebottom's 45, and the match was halved on holes, but as the Advertiser records, 'They would have done much better had they been acquainted with the course, which offers pitfalls to players unaccustomed to it. There were some remarkably good drives witnessed.' In addition to Orme, among those present were Frank Robinson, Honorary Secretary, Robert Hyde, Dr J Howie-Smith, Mr and Mrs W Battersby, Mr and Mrs J Battersby, Mr W Johnston, Mr A Daniels, Miss Daniels, Mr and Mrs J Higson, and Mr J Longson. Like Orme, many of these were also at that time members of the Disley club. Their names appear frequently in the records of the early years of the club. Incidentally, the land at Woodsmoor was leased from Sir JE Barlow who specifically forbade the playing of golf on Sunday.

The pavilion had been bought from the engineering firm of Boulton and Paul. It provided retiring rooms for ladies and gentlemen and smoke rooms and other facilities. The rooms were comfortably furnished and members expressed their approval. After the Davenport club moved to Torkington, the pavilion was sold to Fulshaw Golf Club for £60. Fulshaw had been founded in 1907 following the relocation of Wilmslow Golf Club from this site in 1903. Subsequently Fulshaw became Alderley Edge Golf Club and the pavilion served the club well until as recently as 1971. As for the old course at Woodsmoor, when vacated by Davenport, it was part of the land leased from Sir JE Barlow by Mirrlees, Bickerton and Day when they built their diesel engine factory in Hazel Grove. The golf course was run and maintained by employees of Mirrlees, mostly Scots transferred from the company's original Mirrlees, Watson and Yarvan factory in Glasgow. Mirrlees Golf Club survived until 1988 when it was closed by the company, but vestiges of its fairways and green sites are still visible to the observant golfer's eye on the approach to the railway bridge on Bramhall Moor Lane, and especially so from the cabin of an airliner on its approach to Ringway Airport. Although the course was somewhat changed from Davenport's original, four holes remained more or less as laid out and the 4th green was said at the time of the closure to have been

the only surviving green, with turf some eighty years old. It remains a recreational area to this day despite several attempts to obtain planning permission for house building.

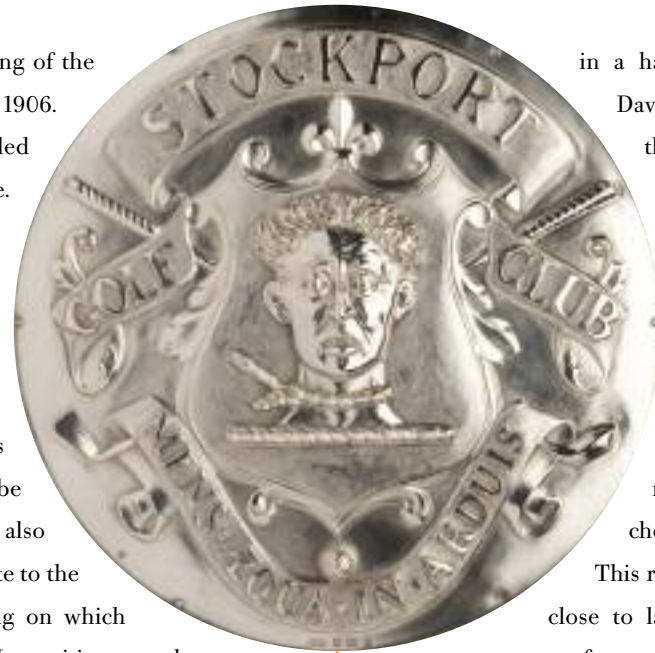
The Royal and Ancient Golfing Annual of 1908-09 (*shown below*) records the institution of Davenport Golf Club in December 1905, the first captain being George Orme and first lady captain being Miss Daniels. Membership numbers by 1908 had risen to 188 gentlemen and 70 ladies. Only 12 of the ladies actually played golf, but they took visitors along to play on Tuesdays.



EXTRACT FROM R&A GOLFING ANNUAL 1908-09

(FIVE)

ORIGINAL CLUB CREST IN SILVER



There is a record of the first 'general' meeting of the ladies, which took place on December 12th 1906. Nine ladies were present and they decided unanimously to form a Ladies' Committee. Eight of those present were elected as officers and Committee members. What happened to the ninth lady is not recorded. Miss Daniels was elected Lady Captain. In the following month, January 1907, all ladies were requested to return three cards for 9 holes in order that handicaps could be awarded for the Davenport course. They also resolved at this first recorded meeting to write to the gentlemen to request an additional evening on which lady members might 'play the course.' In writing to the gentlemen the ladies offered, if granted a second evening to play, to give way to gentlemen and, in the event of the course being crowded, ladies would not play at all on the second evening. Perhaps anticipating a

By February 1908
THE LADIES FELT THAT IT WAS TIME THAT THEY AWARDED THEIR OWN HANDICAPS AND NO LONGER TO ASK THE GENTLEMEN TO DO THIS. IN SEPTEMBER A MATCH WAS ARRANGED, MARRIED LADIES VERSUS SINGLE LADIES, OVER 18 HOLES PLAYING FROM THE MEN'S TEES.

negative response, the ladies' letter went on to suggest 'perhaps an experimental period' or, if not, then perhaps mixed foursomes could be permitted on a second evening. Their request was refused.

In May 1907 the ladies requested the gentlemen to handicap those ladies who had returned cards. It was decided to arrange fortnightly competitions throughout the summer. However it was felt that 18 holes for competitions were 'too great a strain' for ladies: 14 holes would be adequate.

With its location in the Bramhall area and the adoption of the name, Davenport Golf Club, it was natural that the club should adopt as its crest that of the Davenport family who had lived at Bramall Hall for centuries. George Orme was uncertain (see opposite) if the club had obtained permission for this, but the crest and motto have become firmly established now as the club logo. Its Latin motto, MENS AEUQA IN ARDUIS, translates as 'A stable mind in adversity,' a motto thoroughly appropriate to golf – while things are going well! The crest, showing a rogue's neck

1907
MR J BRANCH REQUESTED A KEY TO ALLOW HIM TO PASS THROUGH A CATTLE GATE TO ACCESS THE FAR FIELDS AT DAVENPORT SINCE THE PEDESTRIAN OPENING WAS SO SMALL HE RISKED 'PUNCTURE' EVERY TIME HE PLAYED GOLF. HE WAS REFUSED A KEY.

in a halter is said to have been adopted by the Davenports after the family had been granted by the King the right to hang sheep stealers.

The Davenport course and its pavilion may have been humble, but they gave the club a start. Development, however, was already afoot, not least because the Woodsmoor site was at risk from the power of the Freeholder's Company who had the right to take any portion of the course required for building purposes. Slices of cherished land did indeed disappear at intervals.

This risk potentially affected all golf courses located close to large towns so, clearly, there was never any prospect of extending the Woodsmoor course to 18 holes. Orme continues the narrative:

'Whilst we were at Davenport, Mr Hyde and I were very busy looking round for land suitable for a good 18 hole course and eventually Mr Hyde discovered the land at Torkington. Mr Hyde and I inspected the land and I expect Barrie was with us. The Committee also inspected the land and they approved of it.'

I was asked to arrange terms with the agent for the land, Mr Charles Brady, and with the approval of the Committee I arranged for a lease of 21 years with the option of a further 14 years and the option of purchase at a stated price. My recollection is that the land was subsequently purchased before many years had expired, at a price less than the option price.

There was some debate as to whether we should include the land on which the 6th, 7th and 8th holes are situated. It was very wet and I doubted whether it could be drained. Barrie said 'Leave it to me and I will drain it,' and he did, and they are now amongst the best holes in the course.

I think Sandy Herd laid the course out, but I am not sure of this. Some years afterwards, I think, another professional went over the course and suggested some improvements, but I don't remember what they were or who the professional was.

Some of the greens were made out of the land as it was, without returfing, when the site for the green was a good bit of turf.

Trees had to be cut down and ditches filled in and many miles of drain pipes laid down (I think I was told that there were 20 miles of pipes).

Suggestion book
19th March 1907
I SUGGEST THAT MR J HIGSON'S HANDICAP BE REDUCED. FRED LOWE
23rd March 1907
I SUGGEST MR. LOWE MINDS HIS OWN BUSINESS.

Peter Barrie worked terrifically hard in converting the farm land into a golf course. There were no mechanical shovels, tractors or motor mowers as there are in use to-day. Barrie showed me his hands one day and I noticed that they were much swollen with pushing the turf cutter.

It will thus be seen that the course at Torkington owes its existence to Mr Hyde for discovering the land and to Peter Barrie for turning it into a golf course, and its present splendid condition to a long line of officers and committee-men for improving it and its upkeep.

It was at Mr Hyde's suggestion that the name was changed to the Stockport Golf Club and that it was formed into a company limited by guarantee. We retained the crest of the rogue's neck in a halter which we had adopted at Davenport. I question whether we had any right to adopt the crest as it was that of the Davenport family of Bramall Hall. I can't remember who proposed adopting the crest.

As to the buildings – when we took the land I think there were two houses semi-detached and a lot of farm out-buildings. On Mr Hyde's recommendation we employed a joiner to put the two houses into one and to build on the locker rooms and the small shop. The entrance was in the middle facing the drive and access to the upper floor was up a very narrow staircase.'

As Orme reports, it was Robert Hyde, the club's second Captain, who was mainly responsible for locating the site for the club's permanent home in Torkington, assisted and encouraged by Orme and Barrie. As Town Clerk of Stockport, he was handily placed to seek out a suitable site with enough feature in the land to create an interesting golf course without the need for excessive earth moving. About 122 acres were secured from Mr R Shepley Shepley on a 21-year lease, and a farm house and outbuildings were included. The land had formerly been part of the estate of Torkington Hall, once the seat of the Torkyngton family who had been connected with the estate since about 1200 AD. With incredible foresight, an option was taken to extend the term of the lease or



MRS MURRAY – 1ST LADY CAPTAIN AT TORKINGTON

ROBERT HYDE – 1ST CAPTAIN AT TORKINGTON



to purchase the land freehold for a price of £10,000. A company limited by guarantee was formed which in 1908 took over the assets and liabilities of the Davenport Golf Club, at the same time changing the name to Stockport Golf Club Ltd. Members unhesitatingly advanced the money required to ensure success.

Having acquired the land, fields which had been farmed for centuries, the club could begin the construction of its new course. Orme was correct in recalling that Sandy Herd, one of the outstanding players of his generation, was retained to plan the layout, although the construction work was carried out by Peter Barrie and a team of some twenty men.

Nov 1908
FOURTEEN LADIES SUGGESTED THAT LADIES (OF WHOM THERE WAS A MEMBERSHIP OF 70, BUT ONLY 12 PLAYERS) SHOULD BE PERMITTED TO HAVE ONE VISITOR ON TUESDAYS AND FRIDAYS WHEN THE TORKINGTON COURSE OPENED AND THE COST BE REDUCED TO 6D INSTEAD OF THE CURRENT 1/-.
SUGGESTION TURNED DOWN.

Barrie was a large, strong man, who came from the Muirfield area, that important golfing haven on the southern shores of the Firth of Forth, opposite Bass Rock. In addition to the famous links of the Honourable Company of Edinburgh Golfers at Muirfield itself, there are the three courses at Gullane, North Berwick's historic west course, the Glen, North Berwick's other scenic course,

Luffness New, and less well-known gems such as Kilspindie. With new developments at Archerfield it is unlikely this list will be complete for long! When he began work on the Torkington course Barrie lived in one of the Bosden cottages just across the road from the club entrance. Work began in 1908 and the debt owed by the club to Barrie for carrying out the task will become obvious as the story unfolds.

