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ON 4TH AUGUST 1914 BRITAIN COMPLETED THE LINE-UP OF EUROPEAN COMBATANTS BY DECLARING WAR ON GERMANY. Three days later Lord Kitchener called for the recruitment of 100,000 British troops, yet popular opinion was that this would be a short war and it would be over by Christmas. There were no immediate implications for the golf club other than the putting up of a list encouraging voluntary contributions from members to the Prince of Wales War Relief Fund. With each Committee member donating a guinea and the president £21, a total of £40 was raised within a month.

BASE OF LOCALLY MANUFACTURED 1ST WORLD WAR SHELL USED AS ASHTRAY



Everyday matters, however, were of greater concern to those running the club and in September 1914 the House Committee was authorised to reduce the price of gin by 3d a glass, only to put up the price of beer and stout by a halfpenny in the following December. In fact the running of the bar was a rather haphazard business and when stock was taken at the beginning of September it was for the first time in eighteen months. Unfortunately, it was found that a loss of £181 had been incurred and the finger was immediately pointed at the Steward, Challinor. He was instructed to produce the retail value of the stock or vacate his position. Another stocktaking in November revealed a further deficit of £13.1.2, producing an accumulated debt which someone in Challinor's position could hardly repay instantly. Challinor's offer of a down payment of £5 followed by instalments of £1 a month was accepted by the Committee. There was, happily, a useful outcome to this unfortunate episode in that it was resolved in future to take the stock monthly. Mr and Mrs Challinor,

though, felt uncomfortable remaining at the club and eventually handed in their resignations in October 1915. Meanwhile, Bourne, the club's Professional, had lost the services of his assistant who had enlisted in the armed forces. On the departure of the Challinors, Bourne and his wife were invited to combine the duties of professional (*without assistant*) with those of steward and stewardess. They accepted.



JP TAYLOR WITH THE NEW CAR CHASSIS FITTED WITH SPIKED STEEL REAR WHEELS TOWING GANG MOWERS IN 1923

Golf continued to be played, despite the hostilities, and a number of competitions and matches were arranged to raise funds for Stockport and District Comforts Fund, the British Red Cross Fund, the Wounded Soldiers Entertainment Committee and other local war funds. Of particular interest was the James Braid Watch which was competed for, with proceeds going to the Red Cross. The question of payment of subscriptions by those who had enlisted was an issue affecting all golf clubs during the war, and it led eventually to financial hardship and debt at a number of clubs. Stockport's response was to leave it to the discretion of those who had joined up whether or not to pay their subscriptions but that, given the financial position of the club, they should be encouraged to pay.

The club agreed to its premises being used for the entertainment of wounded soldiers and that Officers stationed in Stockport should be offered honorary membership for the duration of their stay. In order to help the war effort it was decided that sheep could, after all, be allowed to graze the course, despite an earlier decision to remove them permanently, but there were still too many jobs to be done in maintaining the course to allow two members of the green staff to be released from their duties. But by October 1915 it became obvious that the club was running into financial difficulties and a deficit of about £360 was predicted for the year. It was decided, therefore, to impose a levy of one guinea on each gentleman member and 5/- on each lady member. In December the decision was taken that, because of the war, no changes



JP TAYLOR ON LEFT, SON OF J TAYLOR, ASSISTANT GREENKEEPER AND FUTURE PROFESSIONAL/GREENKEEPER AT THE NEW HURDSFIELD GC

would be made to the officers of the club. The Treasurer wished to resign, but he was dissuaded from doing so by the rest of the Committee. Response to the levy was poor. Some simply refused to pay, while others were absent on war service. Only £160 had been raised by Christmas and the outstanding deficit was still £127 in mid-February 1916. Various ways of dealing with the problem were discussed, including possible life membership,

but in the end at the Annual General Meeting it was agreed to post a voluntary subscription list inviting members to contribute. A few days later the President announced that he would be willing to subscribe an amount equal to anyone else subscribing, an act of considerable generosity. This was certainly not the last occasion on which Stockport Golf Club had to face debt. It has been a recurring issue ever since, although it has been managed successfully throughout.

In March 1916 an offer was received from farmer John Holland of Broad Oak Farm of a fee of £80 per year for the grazing of sheep on the course. It was accepted on condition that the farmer maintain the fences. While the sheep would take care of some of the course mowing, there was concern about maintaining the rest of the course and a list was drawn up of members willing to 'assist in the work of keeping the links in condition owing to shortage of labour.' Later in the year, in August, it was resolved that 'beyond keeping the grass and the rough mown and the tees and greens in proper condition no extra structural work on the course to be taken in hand for the present.'

As the war progressed the club's involvement in the war effort increased, but sight was not lost of the more mundane matters of running a golf club. Early in 1916 it was resolved to charge card players 3d each to play. The ladies made a special request to be allowed to play the course after 4pm on Saturdays, which was rejected by the Committee, but 'as a special privilege during the war they be allowed to play each week night with the exception of Saturday.' In fact the ladies had played few competitions during the war years and those events that had been held had been deemed unsuccessful because of the poor numbers attending. It was later agreed that the ladies would be allowed the use of the links on Good Friday and Easter Monday, but their letter of complaint about the price for teas brought a wholesale review of prices, issued by the House Committee on April 11th 1916:

Following prices recommended:

Dining Room:	s	d
Pot of tea		3
-do- with biscuits		4
-do- with bread and butter or toast		6
-do- with bread and butter or toast, jam and cake		9
Eggs extra each		3
Plate of cold meat		9
Hot lunch	2	3

Following prices recommended:

Bar Prices:	s	d
Mineral waters		3
Syphon soda		2
Liqueurs		6
Bottled beer or stout		4
Perrier		4
Cherry Brandy		6
Whisky (small)		4
Whisky (large)		8
Brandy (small)		5
Sherry or port		6
Claret (large bottle)	3	6
Claret (small bottle)	2	0
Champagne (large bottle)	12	0
Champagne (small bottle)	6	6
Cigars		4d, 6d, 9d and 1/-
Cigarettes Three Castles		6d and 1/-
Gold Flake		4d and 8d
Tobacco		8d per oz

In an effort to boost membership, entrance fees were reduced in 1916 and it was reported that 62 men and 22 ladies had joined since this initiative, so it was decided to continue the scheme for the time being. But the club still had to be careful. For instance, the Treasurer was permitted to buy a small present for Daisy (*the waitress*) on the occasion of her leaving to get married. However, the amount was to be deducted from the New Year's gifts to staff! 1916 also saw a first mention of the possible provision of a piano for the club room. In fact there is little to suggest that a war was actually taking place, and the minutes are punctuated with vignettes of the punctiliousness of the times, such as, 'Letter of thanks sent to Mr Pratt for the gift of a waste paper basket for the Links.'

One area in which the war had some impact was public transport, and on November 2nd 1916 a Special Committee was set up to look into the cost of providing some sort of transport from the Bull's Head public house in Hazel Grove to the clubhouse. A week later they reported back with an ingenious solution suggesting the possible purchase of a 5-seater Ford motor car with a driver provided from the ground staff. The Committee, taking a moderate line, preferred to see if an alternative scheme could be found.

In November 1916 it was agreed to allow the links to be used for cadet training and early in 1917 a letter was received from Hazel Grove Council concerning the possibility of utilising part of the course for the growing of crops. The secretary replied that the land was already let for the

grazing of sheep and that was serving in the national interest.

Besides, it was emphasised that only a small portion of the course was suitable for the growing of crops. But that did not satisfy the authorities, and a visit from the Cheshire Agricultural Sub-Committee in February 1917 resulted in a letter from the club saying that it was prepared, after all, to dig up 12 acres to be sown with oats and that it would allow further grazing on the course. It turned out to be a successful venture and on October 4th of that year it was reported that the oats had been sold for £46 and that it had been arranged with the Cheshire Agricultural Sub-Committee to plough up the ground to the right of the 1st fairway, on the right of the 2nd fairway, from the 3rd tee to the corner of the hedge and on the triangular patch to the right of the 3rd fairway. Additionally, it was agreed to plant wheat where the oats had been, potatoes behind the 12th green and 13th tee, oats to the right of the 2nd and 3rd fairways and beside the 1st fairway.

Lunch apparently continued as normal, with its price reduced in May 1917 to 1/3 for a trial period. Then, two months later, it was proposed to make a charge of 9d per head to all those using the lunch room between 12 and 3pm *'in aid of club funds.'* Clearly these were good lunches, for in February 1918 the Committee sent a message *'that the best thanks of the meeting be given to Mr and Mrs Bourne and "Kate" for the excellent way they have catered for the members, considering the many difficulties they have had to contend with in providing the necessary food.'*

Meanwhile, a piano had at last been purchased for £25 but, of far greater significance, a paid assistant secretary J.A. Fletcher, was appointed for the first time in the club's history in November 1917, at an annual salary of £50. Quite what provoked this forward-thinking appointment is not recorded, but it was still a relatively uncommon action at this time, most clubs being run from the secretary or chairman's office, his secretary adding to her work-load by looking after the club's correspondence as well. Indeed, one famous British club, Alwoodley, almost prided itself in the 1990s as being the only club in England where it was still not possible to have a letter typed on the premises!

The ladies had obviously managed to continue their golf, despite their lack of numbers, for in September 1917 at one of their Committee meetings it was proposed that competitors in their competitions might be

SADLY, THERE ARE NO RECORDS OF THE NUMBER OF MEMBERS OF STAFF WHO ENLISTED TO FIGHT IN THE GREAT WAR OR WHO DID NOT RETURN. HOWEVER, THE STORY IS TOLD OF THE CAPTAIN WHO CUT THE THREE SILVER BUTTONS FROM HIS BLAZER AND GAVE ONE TO EACH OF THREE MEMBERS OF GREENS STAFF WHO WENT OFF TO WAR. THE BUTTONS WITH THE CLUB CREST WERE TO HELP REMIND THE MEN OF HOME.

allowed to shelter during heavy rain, but as no one was prepared to second the proposition the motion was not carried and the ladies had to continue playing whatever the weather.

They allowed themselves one slight respite from adversity during the following spring by making a rule that at the 1st, 2nd and 3rd holes a ball lying under the bank, if unplayable, may be lifted and dropped two clubs' length (*not nearer the hole*) on loss of a stroke. In those days there was much less referral of such decisions to the county or LGU, or even the men's Committee, for that matter. Local rules were a matter largely for the club itself.

Rules and regulations of a more domestic nature continued to pour forth from the Committee governing the everyday life of the club and its members. For instance, April 6th 1918: *'resolved that the staff be not allowed to cook special food for members but that members may bring in cold food and if they use the dining room each one pays the usual 1/2d and the dining room ticket 9d.'* Or, July 1918: *'It was resolved that ladies be allowed to have Tea in the Gents dining room if accompanied by a gentleman member – Saturdays, Bank Holidays and Competition days excepted.'*

On September 4th 1918 printed cards were issued: *'On account of the extreme scarcity of coal, it is requested that the members do not stay on the club premises after 8 o'clock pm.'* The Bournes were still caretaking in the clubhouse and on October 2nd 1918 *'Mrs Bourne and Kate to be spoken to impressing them with the urgent necessity of sparing coal, coke and oil as much as possible.'*

March 1918 had seen a request for permission to use part of the course for training A Company of the 6th North East Cheshire Regiment. They were granted the use of *'that part of the course belonging to the 6th, 7th and 8th greens, so long as it is not found to unduly interfere with the members' privileges.'* And this, in addition to the continuation of the club's market gardening and sheep farming, were the last contributions required of the club toward the war effort. At the Ladies' Annual General Meeting held on December 13th 1918, the Lady Captain, Miss Bancroft, was able to say, *'How pleased we all are that the war is over, and that we should be able to play our golf with easier minds.'*

The war may have finished, to the relief of all concerned, but easier times were not immediately at hand.

