



THE 18TH GREEN AND FIRST TEE

**IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN ASSUMED THAT A CLUB IN THE FINANCIAL POSITION THAT STOCKPORT WAS IN IN 1930 WOULD HAVE LEAPT AT THE GENEROUS OFFERS OF FINANCIAL GIFTS OF SEVERAL OF ITS MEMBERS.**

In fact Whitworth's offer caused much debate about the desirability or otherwise of providing the Professional with a house on the premises and its possible confusion with the need to deal with derelict outbuildings. Whitworth was himself a member of the Committee and the arguments within meetings cannot have been easy. In May a decision was made not to build a house for the Professional, the matter being held over on a split vote of 5:4 against.

Another assumption that might be made about the 1930s is that honesty and integrity while playing the game could be taken for granted. But even in 1930, there were bandits at work. On Invitation Day it was found out that certain prize winners who had come from another club actually had lower handicaps than they had played off at Stockport. The matter was reported to the Cheshire Union, the golfers were disqualified and the Secretary wrote to them asking them to resign from their home club.

Theft remained a persistent problem and there are further entries mentioning money, personal possessions and, specifically, golf balls stolen from members' clothing and golf bags throughout these years. *'Lost your ball, mister?'* was a frequently repeated question from urchins to members. A notice had to be posted in the clubhouse *'requesting members to refrain from giving gratuities to boys at the 5th, 7th and 8th holes, for recovering balls; and also further requesting that the members should insist on the boys removing themselves from the course, as they pass.'* Caddies, too, continued to disrupt the order of everyday club life and *'It was decided to exhibit a notice in the Caddy Shelter, that any caddie found trespassing on the wrong side of the fence recently erected, will be dismissed.'*

Unlike a number of clubs of a similar age, Stockport has never had Artisan members: golfers, very often tradesmen, who pay a lower subscription (*usually significantly lower*) but give fixed hours of service to the club by helping with course and clubhouse maintenance, thereby reducing the club's manpower bill. Usually artisan members are not allowed the use of the clubhouse, but may have a basic shed provided in which they can change. There is a strong camaraderie between artisans



**August 1932 suggestion**  
 .....  
 IN THE OLD DAYS BULRUSHES WERE PROVIDED TO HIDE BABIES. IS THERE ANY NECESSITY THAT THEY SHOULD HIDE GOLF BALLS, AND DAMP THE ARDOUR OF ELDERLY GOLFERS? I AM ALLUDING TO THOSE IN THE HOLLOW ON THE 17TH. MAY THEY BE REMOVED?

from the different clubs to which they belong and in April 1930 the Artisan Golfers' Association requested to be allowed to play a 36-hole competition at Torkington on June 19th and 20th. The request was agreed to, only for it to be rescinded the following month when it was found that the dates were inconvenient. But, in general, visiting parties of golfers were, where possible, encouraged.

Stockport had had its own electricity generator for some time, but in July 1930 it was decided to enquire of Hazel Grove Council what the possibilities might be of having mains electricity laid on. In September a further enquiry was made, this time about installing mains gas for cooking. Progress was swift on the electricity front with the cable being laid to the clubhouse in November and by December 18th mains electricity was up and running. *'The high watt power of some of the light bulbs was mentioned, and the Chairman of the House Committee undertook to install lower powered ones where necessary.'* It cost a mere £15 to have the cable laid, and in January 1931 the club more than recouped the outlay by selling its now redundant electric generator for £30. The installation of gas at £50, however, was felt to be too expensive.

In deciding not to proceed with building a house for the professional a major factor was the poor state of most of the outbuildings. During the summer of 1930 long and detailed discussions were held about storage and maintenance facilities for the green equipment. *'Renouf would also have full satisfaction of his requirements, which would tend to make him happier in his work.'* To what extent the dilapidated buildings contributed to the condition of the course can only be guessed at, but in November 1930 the Greens Committee met to *'discuss the best method of dealing with the deplorable condition of the course.'* As a result, a complete drainage plan of the course was drawn up.

A novel proposal for raising money surfaced in March 1931. It was an idea that had already proved successful at Prestbury Golf Club. Tickets would be sold at 5/- each, entitling the purchaser to a day's golf on any day up to August 31st 1931. Each ticket sold would be entered into a draw to win a prize of a £50 debenture. A Special Committee was set up to look into it. Shortly after that the Captain, RB Johnson, and a Committee member, PW Trace, generously donated £25 each for the purchase of the debenture.

March 1931 also saw a move towards a relaxation of the strictly limited hours when ladies might be permitted to play. There had been a slight show of generosity towards them during the previous year when it had been decided that *'on two Tuesdays in each month, when the ladies are holding competitions, they shall have the privilege of the 1st tee being reserved for them from 12.50pm to 2pm.'* But it was not a unanimous decision. There were two dissenters among the Committee on that occasion. This time an informal General Committee meeting was called to discuss the question of ladies playing on Saturday evenings. A survey of clubs in the broad district of Stockport and Manchester revealed that only two did not permit it, Birkdale and Reddish Vale. It was allowed at Buxton and High Peak, Cavendish, Prestbury, Bramall Park, Bramhall, Hesketh, Manchester (Hopwood), North Manchester, Hazel Grove, Southport and Ainsdale, Disley, Alderley Edge, Wilmslow, Withington, Northenden, Denton, Ringway, Chorlton, Houldsworth, Cheadle, Ashton-on-Mersey, Davenport, and Prestwich. Of these, Southport and Ainsdale, and Wilmslow allowed ladies the use of the course all day on Saturdays, while the rest mostly specified a time such as 4pm or 5pm after which such play was allowed. It was strongly felt that the views of members should be sought and they should be urged to agree to this proposal as they may otherwise lose members to other local clubs which allowed it. In July an experiment of opening the course to ladies after 6pm on Saturdays was instigated for a trial period. By May 1932 attitudes had changed sufficiently for it to be resolved that for the future, ladies may play on Saturday evenings after 6pm, but not on competition days.

In the meantime, however, a serious financial crisis had blown up. On March 27th 1931 a letter was received from Williams Deacon's Bank Ltd, Stockport pointing out that the club's overdraft facilities were inadequate to cope with the current financial situation in which the club was sliding further into debt. The bank requested to know the *'trend of the account between now and the next six or nine months.'* The letter went on to urge considerable economies, the bank wishing to learn what measures would be taken to cope with these. If further monies would be required from the bank, the bank may itself require further securities against the loan.

Despite the severe tone of the letter and the Treasurer's accounts, which confirmed the import of the situation, there is nothing further formally minuted about the overdraft until October 7th, when the

Honorary Treasurer reported that the bank had telephoned to say that *'they could not see their way to honour further cheques drawn upon them by the club, in view of the overdraft, which apparently was increasing each month.'* Various schemes would need to be explored for members to guarantee the necessary overdraft. Given the situation, it seems extraordinary that the bulk of the minutes for the Committee meeting on this particular day are about other matters such as the Annual Dinner, handicap revisions, arrangements for the Four-Ball Bogey Competition on October 24th and the decision not to charge a ladies' entrance fee until lady membership numbers reached 150.

On October 20th the bank again registered concern over the club's overdraft, so a list was drawn up of 32 men members who were likely to assist in the guarantee of the overdraft. Yet there is room in the minutes, even at this critical time, to note that the Honorary Secretary reported that Mr Isherwood had presented a mounted hippopotamus foot to the club, which was accepted with much pleasure by the Committee. Perhaps Mr Isherwood's munificence inspired others to follow in his, as it were, footsteps for, soon after, it was noted that a gift of a pair of horns (*mounted*) had been fixed in the hall, these being donated by his wife!

A special meeting of the General Committee was then held on November 4th and several other members were requested to attend. It seems that only now was the seriousness of the financial position, with an estimated overdraft of £2,500, fully appreciated. The suggestion was made to see if the bank would accept a debenture issue of £2,000, ranking *pari passu* with the first mortgage loan holders, as security for any overdraft up to £2,500. Also, an approach would be made to the first mortgage loan holders to see if they would postpone any repayment of their capital for two years. At the Annual General Meeting at the start of the year, on January 31st 1931, it had been proposed and agreed to change the year end from December 31st to June 30th, and so it was now decided to ask members to pay 18 months' subscription in January rather than 6 months in January and 12 months in July. It was also decided to hold a meeting of members on November 21st to see if promises could be obtained to obviate the issue to the bank of such a large amount of debenture stock.

At that meeting the members were told that the situation had arisen because of the change in date of the year end. *'That in the opinion of this*

*meeting the Committee should appeal to the members for offers, that the First Debenture Holders should be approached to agree to a moratorium for a period of years for a return of their capital, and that the bank be allotted a debenture to cover their overdraft.'*

On December 22nd a meeting of debenture holders was called, with repayment due on January 1st 1932. It was carried unanimously that the repayment of monies secured by the Debenture Trust Deed should be postponed for three years from this date. By January 6th 1932 the Treasurer was able to report that promises, foregoing of interest and postponed payment of debentures, had raised £1,025 towards the overdraft. At a Committee Meeting on January 29th 1932 the financial position showed a decrease in the deficit of 1931 of £85 compared to the same period in 1930. And that is the last heard of this episode for the time being.

Golf club life seems to have continued unaffected despite the skirmish with the bank. The winter programme of course maintenance for 1931/2 was to be undertaken, enlarging, reconstructing and altering the bunkers *'to make the course more up to date.'* Only three men would be working on the course, to reduce the wage bill.

In November 1931 the ladies were invited to nominate two members of their Committee to co-operate with the House Committee in the management of the Catering Department. January 11th 1932 saw the first meeting of the House Committee attended by ladies, Mrs Wilkinson and Mrs Ward Thomas. Both were appointed to the Sub-Committee to deal with a list of complaints about members of the House Staff and to seek economies, whilst giving satisfaction to the members. The ladies set about their business briskly, reporting to the House Committee on January 18th that they had made a tour of inspection of the kitchen and various staff quarters *'and it was apparent that a deplorable state of affairs existed. The cooking utensils were in a dirty condition, the kitchen floor had not been scrubbed for some time – judging by the filthy condition in which it was found, smells were prevalent in the scullery where slops, etc., had not been cleared away, and the ladies were of the opinion that we had been lucky to have escaped cases of poisoning.'* The ladies' locker rooms were also reported to be in a very dirty state.

As a result, a four-page letter was written to the Cook-Housekeeper reporting in detail: *1. Inattention 2. Delay in Service 3. Differentiation*

*between members 4. Too rigid adherence to times of service 5. Cold vegetables 6. Poor quality of Ladys' (sic) afternoon teas 7. Dirty condition of Ladys' (sic) locker-room and sitting room.*

It was inevitable that on January 26th the House Committee decided to advertise for a new Cook-Housekeeper. In February a Mrs Armitage and her daughter were offered the position. The kitchens and back premises were to be thoroughly cleaned and redecorated before Mrs Armitage took up her post. The house staff at this point consisted of three male servants, the Cook-Housekeeper, a waitress, a housemaid-waitress (*Mrs Armitage's daughter*) and a live-in kitchen maid. Once Mrs Armitage had taken charge, the House Committee announced that it wished to improve service in the dining room at the same time as looking into further economies, particularly in the matter of the laundry bill.

An entry in the minutes of February 24th 1932 indicates not only how all the drainage work which had been done over the years, continuing to build on Barrie's huge initial drainage programme while constructing the course, had been hugely beneficial, but also how Stockport's benevolent ethos extended beyond the club and its members to its larger golfing family, the other clubs within the Cheshire Union. It was simply recorded that a letter had been received from the Secretary of Didsbury Golf Club thanking Stockport for the kindness shown to them while their own course was unplayable. No drainage however could cope with the terrific thunderstorms experienced on May 1st 1932. The photographs tell their own story.

There is often something to be learned by reading between the lines of Stockport's minutes. For instance, in June 1932 there was a special meeting of the Committee to arrange Ladies' Day, to be held that year on July 4th. In addition to the main competition there would be a cross-country: 1st ladies' tee to 5th green; 6th tee to 8th green; 9th tee to 12th green, with the gentlemen driving from the first tee and thereafter alternately. There was also to be curly putting on the



THE 17TH FROM BOSDEN COTTAGE



THE 14TH GREEN FROM THE 17TH



ENTRANCE TO CLUB FROM BOSDEN COTTAGE

16th and 18th greens, balloon bursting and tub pitching, and clock golf. It might have been assumed that the (*male*) Committee could have left it to the Ladies' Committee

organise this having agreed on which date and between which hours the event would take place, raising as it always did a considerable sum to be donated to charity (*Stockport Infirmary*). But if the men were to be involved as competitors, even in such frivolities as these, they insisted on taking charge and making all relevant decisions. While, with 21st-century eyes, such pulling of rank may be viewed as arrogance if not downright disrespect, it is in reality nothing more than a reflection of the social attitudes pertaining in the 1930s. It would probably have been no different at any other golf club in the country.

Unfortunately, Stockport's domestic problems continued. Hardly had Mrs Armitage and her daughter arrived than Mrs Armitage, her daughter and the kitchen maid as well all resigned. This was on July 6th 1932. A mere two days later Mrs Croft was appointed as Cook-Housekeeper, her husband as assistant in the kitchen, and her two daughters as assistants in the kitchen and dining room. As a consequence the current waitress had to be dismissed to make way.

Because of the change to the club's year end, LB Johnson was Captain of the club for, unusually, eighteen months. Speaking at the AGM in July 1932 he reported that £592.4.0 had been raised by special appeal to offset

**September 1932**

"DECIDED THAT NO OFFICIAL RECOGNITION SHOULD IN FUTURE BE GIVEN TO MEMBERS "HOLING OUT IN ONE" ON THE COURSE".

the overdraft. Special mention was made of the help received from the ladies, who had handed over £65.10.0 to the Honorary Treasurer, in addition to which they had redecorated the Ladies'

Room at their own expense. He also praised the excellent work done by the two lady members who had been co-opted on the House Committee. Open Competitions for both men and women had been held during the year and both had been a success. A particular success was Ladies' Day which, with its new attractions, had raised £93.13.6 for Stockport Infirmary. *'It is becoming increasingly evident that this annual event is an outstanding feature in the Club's life.'* The ladies were asked to arrange their year to end on June 30th to bring it into line with the men.

An item raised and discussed at that AGM was the treatment of new members. Subsequently it was arranged that a notice be put up for new



**December 1931**

TWO BOYS WERE CAUGHT BY THE POLICE IN POSSESSION OF HOLLY STOLEN FROM THE CLUB'S PROPERTY. THE DECISION WAS TAKEN TO PROSECUTE THEM. ONE OF THE BOYS WAS BOUND OVER IN A SURETY OF £5, THE OTHER HAD HIS CASE DISMISSED.

members and visitors advising that the Steward would fix up for them, if desired, opponents and/or partners.

It has already been noted that, while

Herd and Barrie's routing remains largely unaltered to this day, the course has undergone many changes over the years. On the whole these have been quite minor, but gradually they have accumulated to change the course in many ways. Typical was the list suggested by the Greens Committee in September 1932, the changes to be made by arrangement with the professional:

- 1st Create mound on right of green about 3' 6" high and consider sanding of grass mounds right and left.
- 2nd Reconstruct green and deepen cross bunkers facing tee.
- 3rd Reconstruct bunker on right of drive.
- 4th Carry green further back and reconstruct. Grass bunker on right of fairway past corner of hedge should be sanded.
- 5th Reconstruct green and bunkers short of the green.
- 7th Extend bunker on right of green.
- 9th Move right cross-bunker to the edge of the right rough and 20/30 yards nearer tee.
- 10th Move second bunker further to the right.
- 11th Reconstruct green and bunkers short of green.
- 12th Drain upper part of fairway at once, tighten up the green and construct one or two bunkers in the right of the fairway 20/30 yards further on than the present ones.
- 13th Divide large bunkers on sides of green into three, the one on the extreme left to be turned in towards the green.

A recurring threat to golf at Stockport made a brief appearance on the agenda in October 1932. The East Cheshire Regional Planning Committee sent a letter to the club detailing roads to be made intersecting the course. Stockport did not respond until January of the following year, when the club replied to the Planning Committee stating that it refused to sign any agreement concerning the proposed roads across the course. For the time being, at least, it did the trick, for there was no more mention made of this for some time. And 1932 also closed on a happier note financially, for in December the Treasurer reported that the bank overdraft was now £57 compared with £1,798 at the same period in 1931. Another chapter of Stockport's history closed with yet another instance of successful debt management.