



(FORTY NINE)

THE BEECH TREE &  
JIM WEBB MEMORIAL SEAT

# 9

LITTLE SO FAR HAS BEEN MENTIONED ABOUT TOM RENOUF WHO TOOK OVER AS PROFESSIONAL IN 1930 WHEN FRED JARMAN WAS GIVEN HIS MARCHING ORDERS. Renouf was born in Jersey in 1874, so he was in his fifties when he came to Stockport. He was one of that distinguished band of golfers grouped together under the nickname of the Jersey School. Harry Vardon and Ted Ray were the leading lights, Vardon's record of victory in six Open Championships standing unequalled to this day. He and Ray were the only British players until Tony Jacklin to win the US Open Championship. Astonishingly, in the 1899 Open Championship at Sandwich there were seven Jersey-born players, three Vardons, Ray, two Gaudins and Renouf. Vardon won. Aubrey Boomer, whose father had

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AS AN INSTRUCTOR OF THE GAME  
RENOUF'S ABILITIES ARE WELL KNOWN

taught Vardon at Grouville School, was another Jersey-born player to achieve distinction, winning the French Open four times, and from a later generation came Herbert Jolly who played in the inaugural Ryder Cup at the Worcester Country Club in Massachusetts in 1927. A Royal Jersey Golf Club publication of 1930 summed up the phenomenon: *'It is still among the marvels of the history of the game that one little village in the Channel Islands should have produced a group of players who have figured more prominently in championship golf than the professionals of the whole of England put together.'*

Renouf came to England speaking little English and was appointed first to the Roundhay club in Leeds. That was in 1896. He did not stay long, moving to Shipley for a year, before a stint at Carlisle and Silloth from 1897 to 1906, when he moved to the Manchester Golf Club at Hopwood where he stayed until his move to Stockport. At Hopwood he acquired a reputation as an excellent teacher and apparently attracted Fred Astaire and his sister, Adele, to the club for golf lessons.

By the close of 1932, however, Renouf was unhappy with the situation at Stockport. He complained to the Committee that members were not purchasing balls from him, but from caddies; members were not paying him for handling and storage of their clubs; members rarely took him out for a round; the Steward was continually practising on the course and often playing with members; and Renouf's assistant was not being included in Christmas gratuities from members. It should be added that the Steward, Eric Burd, was a very accomplished player and he will feature, as a player, later in Stockport's history. As Steward he was popular with the members and his efficiency was clearly apparent to the Committee which in July 1933 made him also Assistant Secretary, raising his wages by 10/- to £3 per week.

On January 1st 1933 a new Standard Scratch and Handicapping Scheme came into effect. The Cheshire Union's suggestions for Stockport were agreed by the club, putting the course within Group III. The term 'par' was now used, instead of bogey, and Stockport's par was now 72, the 4th, 13th and 15th each reduced by a stroke from previous bogey. Standard scratch was 73, the extra stroke being allocated to the 15th:

|        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |      |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|------|
| 1st 5  | 2nd 4  | 3rd 4  | 4th 4  | 5th 3  | 6th 5  | 7th 4  | 8th 3  | 9th 5  | = 37 |
| 10th 4 | 11th 3 | 12th 5 | 13th 4 | 14th 4 | 15th 5 | 16th 3 | 17th 4 | 18th 4 | = 36 |

After reflection, the Competition and Handicap Committee suggested that the 12th hole should be par 4 not 5. This altered par from 72 to 71 and SSS from 73 to 72. The Honorary Secretary was instructed to seek the Cheshire Union's permission for this. If it was agreed, the one stroke given for *'additional course value'* would transfer from the 15th to the 12th. In the end this additional course value of one stroke at the 12th hole was transferred to the 4th. When once the club would have made decisions of this kind unilaterally, now all Cheshire clubs consulted the Union in an effort to standardise practices throughout the county. As a result of the changes there had to be a revision of members' handicaps. There followed a general increase of 2 for lower-handicap men and 3 for higher-handicap men, with certain exceptions based on competition results. After May 16th 1933 the handicap limit for competitions became 24, having previously been at 20.

Although the club was now on mains electricity, the supply was somewhat variable. So, too, was the intensity of the electric light. However a new substation was constructed early in 1933 which improved matters considerably. A new rate was introduced at the same time, which substantially reduced the quarterly bill. Gas, which had previously been considered too expensive, was also laid on and in February 1933 a hire purchase agreement was signed with Stockport Corporation for the purchase of gas cooking equipment over a period of five years.

Relations between the Committee and the ladies remained strained at times and in January 1933 a request from the Ladies' Captain for a match against the gentlemen was refused. Later a letter was sent to the Ladies' Captain to remind them that they were not allowed the use of the clubhouse after 2pm on Wednesdays and between the hours of 1pm and 6pm on Saturdays. However, there was one slight concession, *'The Committee, however, would be quite agreeable to Lady Members holding any Committee Meetings they think desirable in their room on Wednesday afternoons - if they so desire.'* Ladies' Day, which previously had been such a success, was, of course, now a firm fixture and in 1933 the extra competitions included *'Approaching and putting'* at the 17th, 2nd and 15th greens.

A novelty for 1933 was that all members under 25 years of age were

invited to play in a match on June 19th, President's v Captain's sides, and afterwards entertained to supper by the Committee.

By May 1933 the overdraft had increased to £1,203, as opposed to £1,130 at the same time in the previous year, but it was not considered a serious matter, even though the Annual General Meeting was due soon. Their faith was rewarded, for by the end of October 1933: receipts had increased compared with the same period in 1932 and payments decreased, so the credit balance at the bank now stood at £577.11.9 compared with an overdraft of £143.17.3 at the same point in 1932.

Visiting parties agreed to that year included the *'Manchester Brewing School'* May 22nd. They wrote afterwards expressing their pleasure and satisfaction. It is not recorded whether they invited the Committee to a return visit! Later in 1933 the ladies were at last given permission to have full use of the links after 4pm on Sundays and after 5pm on all Saturdays,

including Club Competition Days. And in September of that year the Radio Industry Golfing Society was given permission to play a competition at Torington. The society continues to visit Stockport annually to this day.

As was customary, a full programme of course alterations was planned for the winter of 1933/4 with the principal change being to reconstruct the 3rd hole by making it a left hand dog-leg. A cross-bunker at the 6th hole was to be filled with sand and a new bunker in front of 7th green created. An earth auger was borrowed for boring holes on the course to see if there was a supply of sand

there. Another significant change was the lengthening of the 9th by moving the green back 35-40 yards. Additionally, the Greens Chairman was requested *'to see the man who cuts the new holes and to instruct him to do the work with more care. It was thought that for competitions the hole should be placed somewhere about the centre of the green.'* There were alterations to the local rules, too, the ponds at the 4th and 5th holes now being considered to be out of bounds.

In October 1933 the ladies offered a prize to be competed for by the men, so it was resolved to return the compliment. But on learning of the proposed formation of a Ladies' Bridge Club for Wednesday afternoons, *'The Committee could not agree to such a proposal.'* Such statements can seem rather blunt when recorded in the minutes, another example being



a comment by the Chairman of the House Committee who reported that *'Burd (Steward and Assistant Secretary) proposed to be married early in 1934. It was arranged that the Chairman should enquire what arrangements Burd proposed to make in regard to the performance of his duties.'* There was no mention of congratulating Burd or of a possible wedding present for the bride and groom! In fact Burd's wages were increased slightly following his marriage.

At the end of October 1933 an Open Professional and Amateur Competition was held. It was a great success, and it was immediately decided to hold another such competition in September 1934.

In December 1933 the President, William Whitworth, announced that he would be prepared to take over the whole of the debenture stock and mortgage debentures and to reduce the rate to 2%. Naturally this news was received by the Committee with grateful thanks. A couple of months later the President slightly revised his offer in that he would now like others to join him in taking over the debentures. This would have to be decided on and a circular letter was sent to the debenture holders. A 75% majority was required for a decision and all but two debenture holders agreed, so there was no bar to the President's scheme. About £1,000 of debenture stock and £2,500 of mortgage stock were to be retained at the 2% rate by members other than the President. However in February 1934 the Treasurer pointed out that the overdraft at the end of the financial year would be worse than previously forecast.

In mid 1933 the club received notice of authority saying that a Town Planning Scheme was to be prepared under the East Cheshire Regional Planning Scheme. It did not immediately affect the club. But in December a notice of application was made to Parliament for an act to empower the County Borough of Stockport to make and maintain an aqueduct conduit, or line, or lines of pipes upon land belonging to the club. A Sub-Committee was formed to handle the matter and any compensation. The deeds were borrowed on loan from the Debenture Holders and inspected. It was found that the club was responsible for the whole length of boundary fence along Offerton Road apart from Mr Marriott's plot of land. It was also found that there was no reference in the deeds to any agreement between the original land owner, Mr Shepley Shepley, and the local council concerning road widening as has been mentioned earlier.

Early in 1934 a meeting with the Town Clerk of Stockport revealed

that the proposal was to lay an 18-inch pipe entering the club's land on the right of the 6th fairway and proceeding in a straight line, leaving the land to the right of the rough ground in front of the 9th tee. Excavation would be about 5 or 6 feet deep, the route would be diverted if there was to be disturbance of a green and everything would be made good. Compensation might be around 2/6 per linear yard. However, the Hazel Grove Council Surveyor pointed out that the pipeline was nothing to do with any proposed road building, but *(if appropriately diverted)* it would increase the value of the land if the land were later sold for housing. It seems that Stockport and Hazel Grove councils had conflicting ideas about exactly where the pipeline should be laid and the club suggested to



THE COMMITTEES  
FROM 1911 TO 1931  
IN SILVER

the Town Clerk of Stockport moving the pipeline to coincide with the Hazel Grove Town Planning Scheme. In April 1934 plans for the pipeline and a road crossing the course were presented to the club. The question of having the pipeline tapped for the purpose of watering the greens was deferred to another meeting. Nothing further concerning the pipeline or the road is mentioned for over a year, and its exact routing seems to have differed from one mention to the next.

In April 1934 the English Golf Union decreed that the maximum handicap allowable on a course with a SSS of 72 would be 22, so the maximum club handicap was altered to 22. At the other end of the playing scale, it was announced that the Northern Professionals' Dunlop Competition was to be played at Torkington on May 9th. JJ Busson, the Professional at Pannal, on the outskirts of Harrogate, went round in 68 in his second round of the tournament, setting a new course record. He was sent a suitably inscribed club tankard. Ladies' Day was held on June 23rd that year. Extra activities included a one-club competition, starting at the 17th tee, playing over the 17th, 10th, 11th, 12th, 13th and 16th holes.

The largely unhappy saga of catering at the club reappeared in April. Mrs Croft, the cook, and her two daughters resigned. A Miss Hayes was engaged as cook, but two housemaid-waitresses had to be found. Miss Hayes, sadly, does not seem to have been a great success. In April 1935 *'The Hon. Secretary reported numerous complaints of the quantity and quality of the lunch served on Good Friday, and said he thought they were quite justified.'* However, the cook thereupon tendered her resignation as she was dissatisfied with her wages of £65 a year when compared with the amount received in gratuities by the waitresses. As a result she was given a wage increase and she withdrew her resignation. At least she now had the use of two new Kelvinator refrigerators, the first the club possessed. They were a gift from a member. Meanwhile new working practices had been introduced for the Steward. He was told to keep out of the kitchen and to remain in the office or in the smoke room. The amount of golf he was allowed to play was curtailed. Unfortunately the staff quarters were in a pretty deplorable state and after months of discussion a survey was made and plans drawn up for their refurbishment. By March 1936 promises of around £350 had been received to defray the cost of rebuilding the staff quarters, so the cost to the club would not exceed £100.

#### AGM July 25th 1934

ARCHIBALD EDMESTON WAS ELECTED CAPTAIN FOR THE SECOND SUCCESSIVE YEAR, A RARE HONOUR, AND RECOGNITION OF EDMESTON'S SUBSTANTIAL BENEFICIARIES TO THE CLUB.

It was at a House Committee meeting in November 1934 that *'Reference was made to an incident which occurred recently when a lady member was served with lunch on a Saturday after 1 pm when the course is closed to ladies. It was decided to suggest to the General Committee that ladies might be served with meals in their own room when, under the bye-laws, the course is closed to them.'* The House Committee now had two ladies co-opted onto it and at the next meeting they pointed out that it was a rule of the Ladies' Committee that no food should be served in their lounge. However they were not in favour of any change to Bye Law No. II *'except that it should be made clear that when the course is closed to lady members the Club House is also closed to them.'* As a result it was resolved to amend Bye Law No. II to confirm that when the course is closed to the ladies so is the clubhouse.

Given the sometimes rather frosty relationship between the Committee and the ladies it was commendable of the Ladies' Committee in December 1935 to invite the Officers and Members of the Committee to attend their Dinner as guests of the Ladies' Committee. They declined the invitation *'on the grounds that the ladies would enjoy themselves better without the gentlemen,'* but they were very grateful for the invitation, none the less.

Another instance of the men pulling rank concerned a letter sent by the Ladies' Golf Union, requesting that lady visitors from the Dominions and Colonies be made temporary Honorary Members for a period not exceeding seven days. The Committee decided to consult the ladies but found that the ladies had already said yes. While the Committee confirmed the action of the Ladies' Committee, they also pointed out to them *'that it was not in their power to settle questions involving membership of the club.'*

In August 1934 the Board of Greenkeeping Research at Bingley reported on a course inspection made by them. Mostly it concerned the state of the fairway turf, but the greens were singled out for praise: *'When examined the greens were in good condition and considering the dry weather the Club has every reason to be proud of the continuous surface available for play. Very few clubs can boast such a complete carpet at this time of year... The tees on the course were in good condition and it is rarely that one finds the teeing areas so well looked after.'* It should be remembered that these admirable course conditions were achieved despite heavy traffic over the

course: the Year Book for 1935 lists no fewer than twenty-seven men's official club competitions including the Balfour and Holdsworth Cups. Add to these a full programme of ladies' competitions, county and other representative matches, many visiting parties and plenty of social golf and it is obvious that the green staff must have worked long and hard to achieve this.

Over the winter of 1934-5 there was the usual flurry of alterations to the course. In January 1935 Renouf relayed the 13th green and there was also discussion about rebunkering the 9th, 12th and 13th holes in particular and the course as a whole. Trees were planted and the suggestion was made that, in order to protect these, a trench might be cut round them and that a ball lying within would be deemed out-of-bounds. Again to protect newly planted trees, April 1935 saw the introduction for a month or so of an experiment, that a ball lying in the spinney in the hollow in front of the 3rd tee must be lifted and dropped within three clubs' length of the edge of the spinney, but not nearer the hole, under a penalty of one stroke. But it had been a poor spring and the condition of the course in summer was giving cause for concern. When the Bingley inspection was made in July 1935 the report was very much in contrast to the one made the previous year: *'It is very disappointing to find that although the major treatments have been carried out, considerable delay has generally taken place....The greens provide a continuous surface which unfortunately is still far from true and the relaid greens are no better than they were 11 months ago.'*



**December 1935**

GENERAL COMMITTEE

THE HON. SECRETARY SUBMITTED A LETTER FROM SIR HENRY FILDES (MP) IN WHICH THE LATTER HUMOROUSLY PROTESTED AGAINST THE ALTERATION OF HIS HANDICAP FROM 17 TO 16 AND OFFERED A TRIPE SUPPER TO THE COMMITTEE IN WHAT HE TRUSTED WOULD NOT BE A VAIN EFFORT TO SECURE 'JUSTICE.' THE LETTER WAS DISCUSSED IN THE SAME HUMOROUS SPIRIT AND THE HON. SECRETARY WAS INSTRUCTED TO ACCEPT, WITHOUT PREJUDICE, THE OFFER OF A TRIPE SUPPER.

That experimental rule on the 3rd hole was a last ditch attempt to salvage something from what was recognised as an unsatisfactory hole. Its design and layout were discussed in Committee and it was agreed that the Greens Chairman might communicate with James Braid, the former Open Champion, now Professional at Walton Heath and in considerable demand as a golf course architect. It is likely that the Stockport Committee's attention

will have been drawn to the newly opened course at Mere. Although George Duncan, Mere's inaugural Professional, had submitted plans for their new course, it was Braid who was commissioned to lay it out. This he did in less than a day. He walked the site, noting which features to retain as he went along, and immediately prepared a plan of the routing of the holes, where the tees and greens should be, the positioning of bunkers and so on. It was then left to Braid's old adversary, Duncan, to supervise the construction along with Harry Quick, one of the club's founders, Harold Jackson, the greenkeeper, and a local nurseryman, Bill Clibran. Mere's full 18-hole course was officially opened, to considerable acclaim, on May 11th 1935. It was shortly after this that Stockport sent for Braid. He visited on August 20th 1935 and the following month his plan was agreed by the Greens Committee for recommendation to the General Committee. It involved:

No.3 Construct new tee 18 yards farther back so that the hole would then be a definite dog-leg.

Construct extra bunker on left 230 yards from the tee, this to prevent any playing across plantation.

Green – extend slope forward 12 yards left corner, nothing at right, present slope too abrupt.

Extend green 4 yards left front and 6 yards right back corners, marked on ground.

Construct grass hollow on left and one on right, also shallow one at back; use material for building up extension to the green.

No.4 Enlarge right hand tee, doing away with the one on the left except during winter months; extension to include ladies' tee.

For this Braid charged £3.10.0. However, on maturer reflection, the Greens Committee decided that Braid's suggested alterations to the 3rd would be too expensive as they required the use of too much material. On the other hand to do only part of the alterations would make the hole worse, so it was decided only to grass over a couple of bunkers and divide one into two. However, the Committee agreed to the construction of a bunker on the left, the materials for this to be obtained from another grassed-over bunker. By January 1936 it was reported that work around the 3rd green was now almost complete although Renouf had been given instructions to ease off the abrupt edges on the new grass bunkers to enable the mowing machine to be used on the slopes. Work must have been more onerous than usual, for the club's horse had been sick and a

Vet's bill of £1.12.0-submitted. The view was taken, however, that there was insufficient work to warrant retaining the horse, it should be disposed of and its paddock alongside the 1st brought into the course by removal of the fence. In the same minutes it is noted that the tractor had recently broken down. Later that winter a turf nursery was started with Mr Owen, one of the Committee members, donating the seed. Further alterations were conducted in-house, rather than consulting a professional architect, and Renouf was asked to submit a scheme for reconstructing the cross-bunkers on the 6th hole. By May 1936 the rule about balls within trenches protecting spinneys on the 3rd and 9th holes had been amended so that the ball would now be lifted and dropped without penalty.

The condition of the course had not hindered the celebration earlier in the year of Royal Jubilee Day (*May 6th 1935*). It had been decided to hold a mixed four-ball competition against bogey in the daytime. Members' guests were allowed to take part in the competition and to enjoy the amenities of the club without having to pay a green fee. Money was authorised for the hiring of a radiogram, for the purchase of fireworks and Renouf was instructed to build a bonfire in the hollow in front of the 17th. Poor Renouf, not only was he expected to reconstruct greens and build bonfires, but also he was responsible for the provision of caddies. This was an altogether harder task: *'The unsatisfactory character of the discipline of the caddies was discussed, and Renouf was instructed to exercise stricter control.'*

In June 1935 the Cheshire Union of Golf Clubs outlined a scheme whereby on payment of an annual subscription of 10/- to the County Union, a full member of any club, which was a member of the County Union and was supporting this scheme, would be eligible to play on any course once only in the year, Saturdays, Sundays, Bank Holidays and Competition Days excepted. 50% of the total subscriptions would be returned to the respective clubs in proportion to the use that was made of their green.

From time to time the name of Mr Marriott occurs in the minutes. During the 1930s he lived at *'The Hollow,'* Offerton Road, the house which backs onto the 1st fairway. He contacted the club in 1935 to enquire about renting an additional piece of land in order to extend his garden. A Sub-Committee was formed to examine the proposal in detail.

An inspection of Mr Marriott's land was carried out and, while there was some chance of more people playing out-of-bounds, it was felt that the extension to the garden would improve the appearance from the course, provide additional protection from the road and shorten the length of the club's fencing. So it was proposed to lease 3,000 square yards of land at an annual rental of £20, with Mr Marriott having first refusal to purchase. In November 1935 Marriott announced that he was not prepared to pay £20 per year. Instead he offered £10.10.0 and was promptly turned down. Then in March 1936, Mr Marriott was back in the frame, this time wishing to purchase enough land to build a tennis court. A Mr Drummond also wondered if he could purchase land on Offerton Road to build a bungalow. He was, unsurprisingly, refused.

The application of financial prudence which had been forced on the club during the past few years could be seen to be effective. As the 1936 Club Annual General Meeting approached the finances were now much sounder. The overdraft had been reduced to £922 and there was a credit in the profit and loss account of £263 at year end. However, at that AGM another perennial problem for the club was once again raised. WA Johnson, retiring from the Committee, *'spoke of the unsatisfactory service rendered by the Professional TG Renouf. He said the course was not in the condition it ought to be, the caddy discipline was bad, the condition of the professional's shop was a disgrace and the lessons given by the professional were so unsatisfactory that members were going to other professionals for lessons.'* While these remarks were undoubtedly well founded, they also illustrate the diverse range of responsibilities put on the shoulders of club professionals back in this era – everything from course reconstruction to man management – and, given how little time they were given to practise or to play, it is hardly surprising that until the advent of Henry Cotton there were few who could challenge the great Americans of the day such as Hagen, Sarazen or the finest amateur of all time, Bobby Jones.