



North Hants Golf Club - A Brief History

North Hants Golf Club is situated at the furthest point west of that wonderful stretch of golf courses built mainly in Surrey, on Bagshot sand, all set amidst pine and silver birch trees, rhododendrons, heather, broom and gorse. As with many of these courses the wilderness of the original heath land character has been lessened by the growth of tress.

The golf course bears the imprint of four famous golf course architects. It was designed by James Braid in 1904, then a youthful and recent open champion and one of the famous triumvirate with Vardon and Taylor. It was extensively redesigned in 1913 by Harry Colt, modified by Tom Simpson in 1930 and three new holes were designed by Donald Steel in 2001. The course as initially laid down by James Braid was some 5,500 yards in length but was lengthened by him to 6,000 yards in 1908, primarily because the newly invented Haskell rubber-cored golf ball was having just as dramatic effect on distances as is the new technology today. The course today stands at just under 6,500 yards.

When North Hants Golf Club opened in May 1904 its ambitions extended much more widely than simply providing a golf course. It was to have the ethos of a gentleman's club and the facilities of an American country club. From the beginning there were lawn tennis courts and croquet lawns of the highest quality. The clubhouse provided dining facilities and overnight accommodation with a dozen or so bedrooms.

All that has of course long since changed. The old clubhouse, still very familiar to so many as the charming farmhouse that it once was, is no longer following its demolition in 2003. Many would say that it was a miracle that it survived standing as a clubhouse for 99 years because the first of many plans for its demolition dated as far back as the early 1930s. The lawn tennis courts, which reached 20 in number in the 1930s and were nationally famous, along with the 4 croquet lawns, did not survive the war and were eventually abandoned in 1948. The turf was sold for a remarkable price and the area was converted into a fine practice ground, then a most unusual asset for a golf club.

A magnificent new clubhouse was opened in 2003. It is situated close to the site of the old clubhouse, now marked by a large stone monolith and it retains that same ambience with the golf course, closely embracing the first tee and eighteenth green and clearly visible from the course. It has been built with decoration and fittings of the highest quality and successfully fulfils the needs and demands of a thriving golf club.

For a large part of its early history, North Hants Golf Club never sought the limelight. In the post-war years it had a reputation as being a golf club strongly dominated by the army (true at the time but long since passed) but the existence of the club became much more widely known with the creation of the Hampshire Hog in 1957. The was a 36-hole scratch trophy that was to attract entrants from the highest ranks of amateur golf, filling an April gap in what was once then only a modest calendar of amateur events. Its list of winners has included many of the finest names in amateur golf. The opening event was won by Michael Bonallack who returned 22 years later to win again, while later winners have included the other two recent true long-term amateurs in English golf, Peter McEvoy and Gary Wolstenholme. Three other winners, Sandy Lyle, Gordon Brand Jr. and Steven Richardson, later became Ryder Cup golfers.

The Hampshire Hog undoubtedly raised awareness in the golfing world of a fine golf course. This awareness was enhanced in 1995 when it was won by Justin Rose, a 14-year old junior member of the club with a record winning score which included a new course record of 65 in the afternoon round. He became the youngest ever golfer to play for Great Britain and Ireland in the Walker Cup in 1997 and achieved wider public fame when, to much astonishment as a 17-year old amateur, he was top of the leader board half way through the third round of the Open Championship at Royal Birkdale in 1998, before eventually finishing in fourth place.

There can be few golfers who have given as much pleasure to the members of a golf club as has Justin Rose given to the members of North Hants Golf Club. When he turned professional in 1998 he was still only a junior member. He is now an Honorary Member and his professional career is followed with avid interest.

North Hants Golf Club has had a long and fascinating history that has recently culminated in celebrations of its centenary in May 2004. For most clubs a centenary is only a celebratory pause in their affairs but for North Hants it's timing has coincided with the completion of three redesigned holes and the building of the new clubhouse.

The club sets forth on its next one hundred years in fine fettle.