



# Book Reviews



## **St George's Hill Golf Club**

by  
**Richard Norris**

Just when one thought that golf club centenary books could not get any better along comes one to set a new standard and prove you wrong. This is certainly true about this particular book. In fact the book is of such proportions I feel it would require a

small book as a review to do it justice. It was written by BGCS member Richard Norris assisted by BGCS member and club archivist, James Collier, a member of the club for 67 years. One has to wonder what many clubs would have done in recording their histories had it not been for members of our Society. What a quality production this is and big in every way containing as it does twenty-six chapters. It must create a new record for the number of pages with 344, every one filled with an astonishing amount of varied and interesting information. Many of which are gems. For example in the wonderful chapter on Harry Colt, the designer of the course, I was not aware he applied to become Secretary of the R&A in 1901. Despite having the backing of Lord Balfour he was unsuccessful eventually becoming the Secretary at Sunningdale. The world of golf nearly lost one of their leading lights. Of course the creation of a golf course has to begin somewhere and in the case of St George's it was the wish of a well-known builder in the area, Walter George Tarrant, to create a high class residential estate with sporting facilities including a golf course. He had picked up this idea when on a visit to America. Interestingly he said that he 'wished to have the first twenty residents lay out a hole'. It was suggested to him eighteen would be a better number and to have a word with Harry Colt! One of the many things I like about the book is that the writer has researched much of the social background into which the Club was born. It was very different compared to today and this may be seen in looking at the names of the Presidents and Captains of the club in its early years.

Adding to this there are great chapters dealing with important associated activities in the Weybridge area such as Brooklands, famous for its aviation history and the banked racing circuit where many historic motor races took place. Even for the most ardent golfer this chapter will be fascinating. The book is set with close spacing so each page has a lot of content. It also includes a vast number of photographs particularly many relating to the development of the golf course and other related matters. I found also that the numerous cartoons by Mel and

The club have been very fortunate to have a complete and very comprehensive archive of wonderful pictures and the author has cleverly contrasted the early black and white photographs taken during the building of the course with beautiful coloured photographs of the holes as they are today.

To gauge what a quality club St George's is and has been since its inception a look at the list of Presidents and Captains will give a good idea. The first President was HRH Prince Alexander of Teck while the first Captain was none other than the great Harold Hutchinson. HRH The Prince of Wales was Captain in 1934-35. It is fascinating to read on the club prospectus the names of the first committee which included one Lord and two 'Sirs', as well as the fact that there were to be only 150 members. Over the years many chapters record the involvement of the members and staff including the professionals, of which there are only four, the Secretaries, the Greenkeepers, Head Stewards, Clubmakers and Caddiemasters. A nice feature of the book is that each of the twenty-six chapters has an introductory heading outlining the content. Another clever way of dealing with the passage of time is to split this up with the tenures of the different Chairmen which varied in length the longest being the difficult period from 1939 - 1962 when Tom McCreath was Chairman. The later chapters give detailed reports on the activities of all the groups at St George's including The Artisans, The Juniors and The Veterans as well as the great celebrations marking one hundred and one years of what can only be a wonderful golf club.

Ladies have been members from the beginning however initially they could only become five day members. When the new course was created in the late 1920s they became eligible for full membership.

Another connection with our Society is the plan of the course shown on the endpapers. Dated 1912 the original plan of the course was found in a skip outside a house in East Molesey by Paul Gossage. Fortunately Paul a non-golfer, but son of Ray Gossage, a founder member of our Society, realised the importance of the plan and contacted the club. After restoration it now hangs in the club lounge.

This has been a very difficult review to write and I feel it is impossible to do this book justice in a short space. All I can say is that it is such a superb book it should be gracing the coffee table in the home of every BGCS member. The book costs £35. It weighs over 2 kg so unfortunately P&P is £13.75 or by courier £8.10 to mainland UK. It is obtainable from: Christine Riggs, Assistant Secretary, St George's Hill GC. tel: 01932 847758, email: [admin@stgeorghillgolfclub.co.uk](mailto:admin@stgeorghillgolfclub.co.uk)