



CHAPTER 2

The development of the course

West Byfleet has long been regarded as a good test of golf, reflecting the quality of the work of its architects, which have included Cuthbert Butchart, John Abercromby, Arthur Croome, James Braid and John Morrison. In their 'Course Design Audit 2011', Mackenzie and Ebert (M&E) said of the course that *'if this were a building, there is no doubt it would be listed by English Heritage.'*

Who were these architects who have given the course such an excellent design provenance, has the design changed since 1906 and, if so, how?

Original design 1906 – Cuthbert Butchart

Cuthbert Butchart designed the original course and was the first professional at Bleakdown from 1905 to 1907. He was a renowned clubmaker and was also responsible for designing, amongst others, the courses at West Hill and Highgate. He worked at Royal County Down and North Berwick before coming to the London area. After World War One, he moved to the US and became the professional at Westchester Biltmore Country Club. At the exhibition match to open the course in May 1922, with Tommy Armour, he defeated Jim Barnes and Walter Hagen who, a month later, was to win the Open at Royal St George's.

At Bleakdown, Butchart had a rather narrow strip of 134 acres with which to work. The land was originally part of Pyrford Heath, an area of mainly sandy soil of poor agricultural quality. This is characteristic of the Surrey heathland belt that runs from Wentworth to Hindhead.



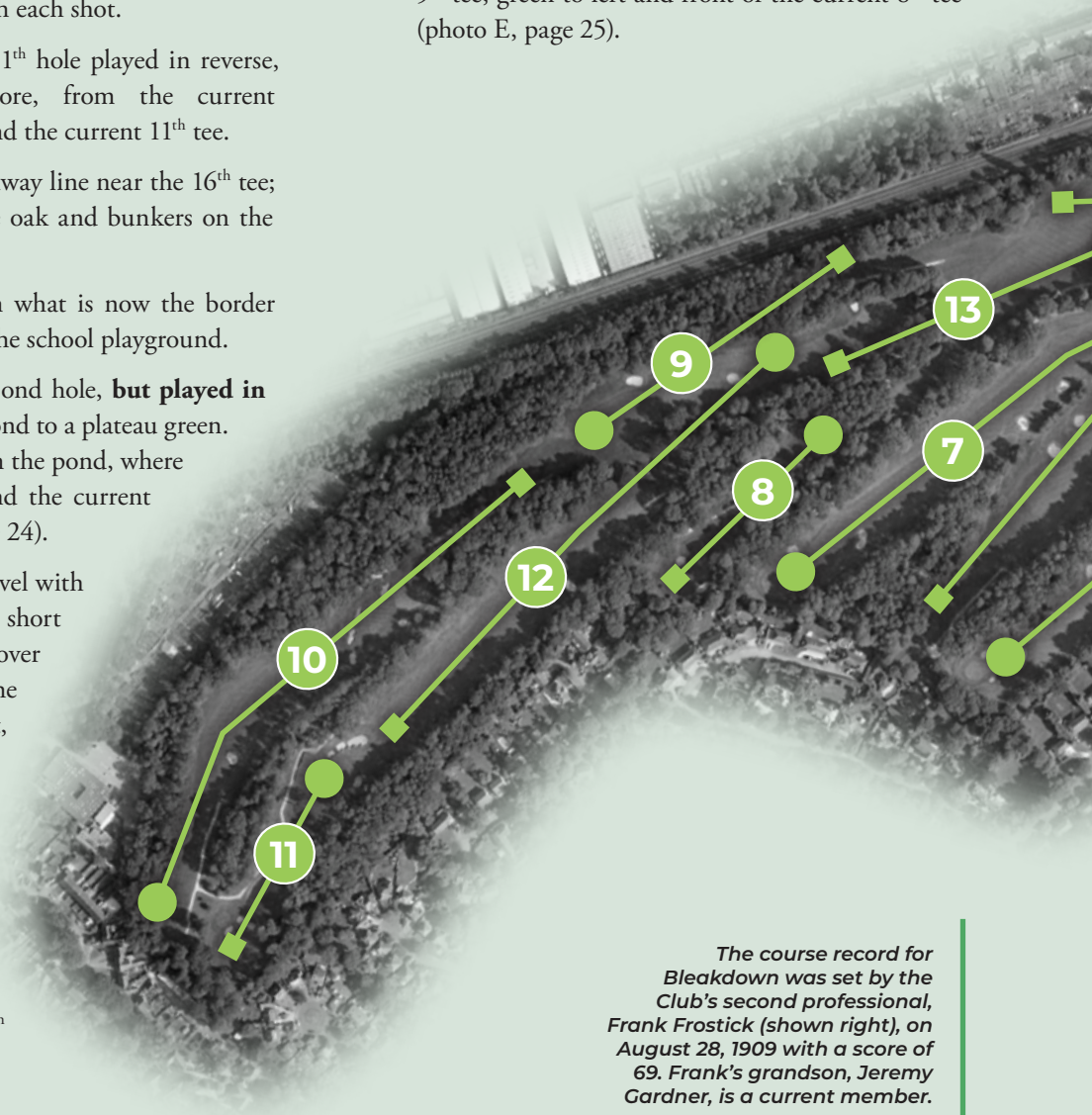
Cuthbert Butchart (second left) with Joe Louis (far right) at Hickory Country Club, Eastchester, New York in 1942. Cuthbert Butchart (1876 - 1955) was born in Carnoustie, a caddy turned professional golfer, clubmaker and course designer. In 1911, he moved to Germany and was interred in Ruhleben prisoner of war camp in 1915. Released in 1919, he emigrated to the US, where he designed courses in Florida and made the clubs with which Walter Hagen won the 1922 Open. Butchart became a US national in 1942 and died in Ossining, New York.

The Club has long believed that Butchart's original design, with a few minor changes, is the course we play today. However, the discovery of two articles written for the 'Royal Automobile Club Journal' in April 1911 has transformed our understanding of the history of course. They reveal that the layout of the holes has changed radically since Butchart's day.

The course descriptions in these articles show that, of Butchart's original layout, he would probably only recognise five holes today, namely the 1st, 2nd, 5th, 6th and 10th (then the 7th). Overleaf, the design of the Butchart course that can be deduced from the RAC journal articles has been superimposed on to the current layout. The course was 5,760 yards in length with a bogey of 78. In the days of gutta-percha balls and hickory shafts this was seen to be a good challenge.

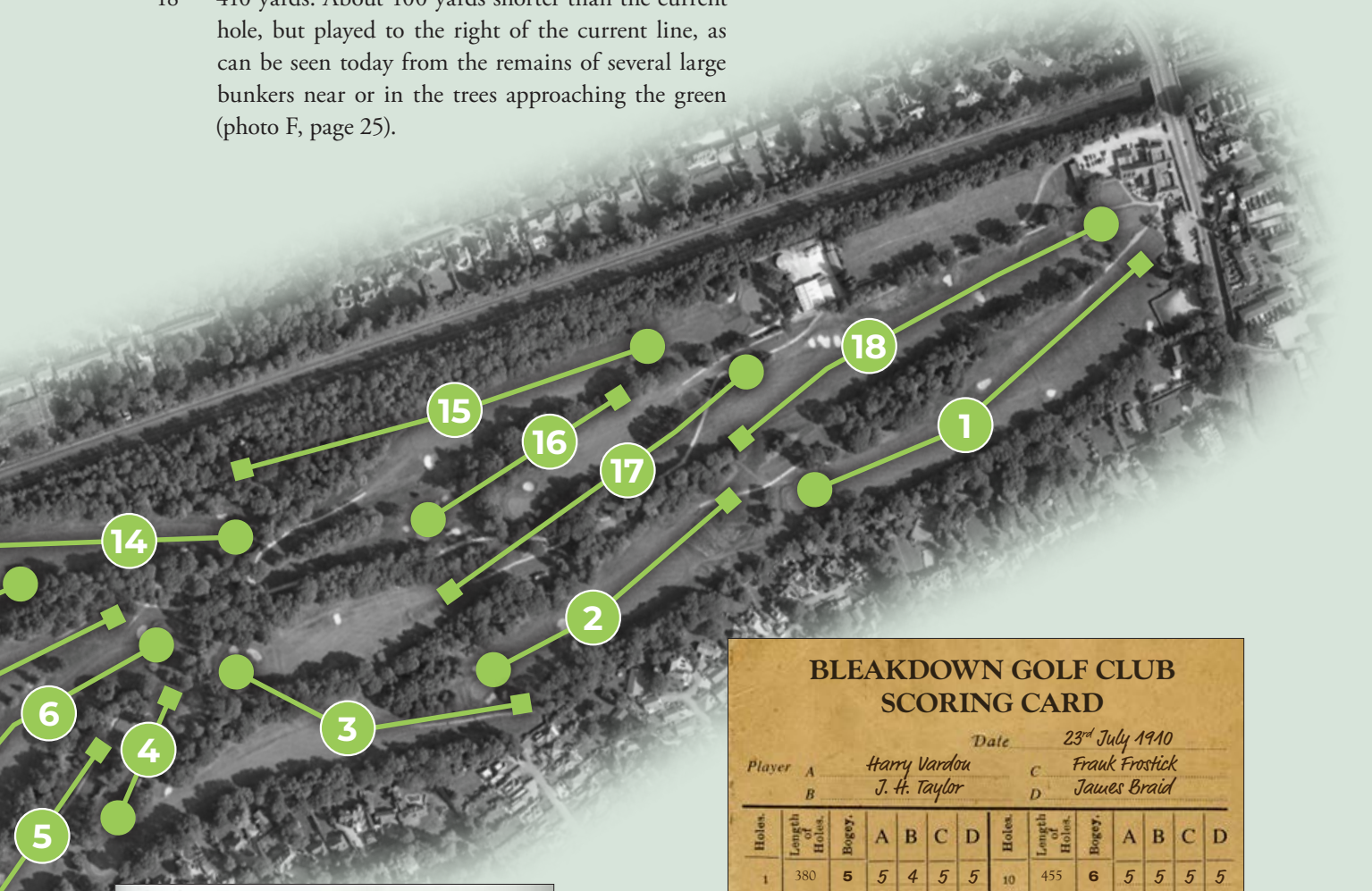
Key features of the Butchart (1906) course layout

- 1st & 2nd Similar to today
- 3rd 340 yards. Tee perhaps set back behind the current 3rd tee; green where the 9th green is today. The left side of the fairway was more open then, with current gardens forming part of the course (photo A, page 24).
- 4th 125 yards. Tee near current 4th green; green near current 3rd green.
- 5th & 6th Similar to today.
- 7th 430 yards. The 10th as we play it today, but with cross bunkers to be carried with each shot.
- 8th 230 yards. The current 11th hole played in reverse, confirming Club folklore, from the current 11th green to a green behind the current 11th tee.
- 9th 280 yards. Tee by the railway line near the 16th tee; green beyond the feature oak and bunkers on the 15th fairway.
- 10th 455 yards. To a green in what is now the border between the course and the school playground.
- 11th 200 yards. The current pond hole, **but played in reverse** uphill over the pond to a plateau green. The tee was 60 yards from the pond, where the tree line starts behind the current 13th green. (photo B, page 24).
- 12th 430 yards. Tee perhaps level with the old bunker 70 yards short of the 12th green; green over the old cross bunker on the 15th hole and on the right, perhaps 70 yards short of the existing 15th green.
- 13th 300 yards. Tee likely in the woods between the front of the current 15th green and the back of the current 11th tee; green beyond the 16th drive bunkers.
- 14th 210 yards. Uphill from a tee to the left of the 16th drive bunkers to a green near the current 16th (photo C, page 24).
- 15th 360 yards. Tee probably to the left of the current 16th green, green near the cross bunkers on the current 7th hole (photo D, page 25).
- 16th 170 yards. Tee probably on the right hand side of the current 8th fairway, playing towards the current 8th green.
- 17th 360 yards. Tee probably in front and left of the current 9th tee; green to left and front of the current 8th tee (photo E, page 25).



The course record for Bleakdown was set by the Club's second professional, Frank Frostick (shown right), on August 28, 1909 with a score of 69. Frank's grandson, Jeremy Gardner, is a current member.

18th 410 yards. About 100 yards shorter than the current hole, but played to the right of the current line, as can be seen today from the remains of several large bunkers near or in the trees approaching the green (photo F, page 25).



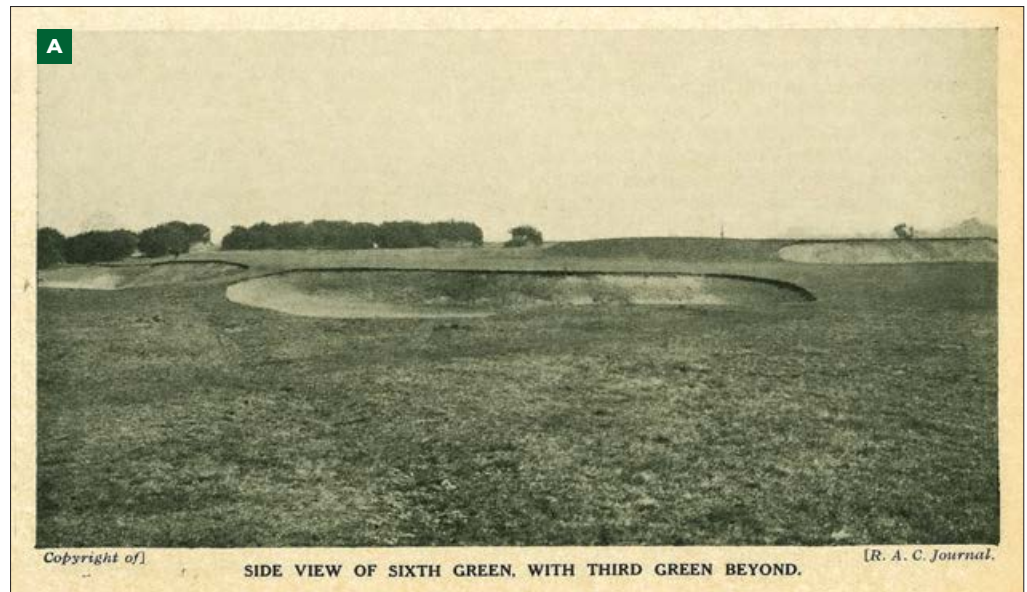
BLEAKDOWN GOLF CLUB SCORING CARD																	
Date 23 rd July 1910																	
Player A Harry Vardon				C Frank Frostick				B J. H. Taylor				D James Braid					
Holes.	Length of Holes.	Bogey.	A	B	C	D	Holes.	Length of Holes.	Bogey.	A	B	C	D				
1	380	5	5	4	5	5	10	455	6	5	5	5	5				
2	340	4	5	4	5	5	11	200	4	3	3	4	4				
3	340	4	4	4	5	5	12	430	5	5	4	5	4				
4	125	3	3	3	3	4	13	300	4	4	4	4	4				
5	300	4	4	4	4	4	14	210	4	3	4	3	3				
6	440	5	4	5	5	5	15	360	5	4	4	4	4				
7	430	5	4	5	4	5	16	170	3	4	3	3	5				
8	230	4	3	4	4	4	17	360	4	3	4	4	4				
9	280	4	4	3	5	4	18	410	5	4	5	4	4				
2,865		38	36	36	40	41	2,895		40	35	36	36	37				
Add First 9 Holes ...							2,865		38	36	36	40	41				
Less Handicap ...							5,760		78	71	72	76	78				
NET TOTAL ...																	
Signed																	

This is how the scorecard might have looked when Frostick played an exhibition match with the Great Triumvirate in July 1910, including their actual hole by hole scores (see Chapter 1).

Photographs of Butchart's course from the RAC Journal of April 1911

(A, B, C, E & F)

*The 6th green in 1911
with the 3rd green behind where
the 9th green is today. A deep
bunker used to lie to the rear of
the old 3rd green.*



*The pond hole was **played in reverse**, uphill to a green just in front of where the 12th green is today. The outline of the 1911 bunkers can still be seen in the slope in front of the current 13th tee.*



The shelving on the fairway on the 16th today looks to be in a similar position to the bunkers on the 14th hole in 1911.





Putting on the 15th green in 1910 - the RAC Tournament at Bleakdown.



The 17th green in 1911 was probably near the current 8th tee and the bogey-5 18th hole was much shorter than it is today.



The 18th green and clubhouse in 1911. According to the RAC Journal: '... the interior... is particularly attractive and comfortable, especially as regards the lounge, where in wintry weather, the open hearth, aglow with huge logs of wood from the estate, is one of the most cheerful sights imaginable. The dining room is also a very bright apartment and the catering is excellent.'

The April 1911 RAC journal articles also shed light on the date of the construction of the clubhouse. Previously we had thought it was constructed in 1912, as maps of the area before that time did not show any buildings where the clubhouse is situated.

However, the RAC articles demonstrate that the clubhouse was certainly around in 1910. Indeed, given that the clubhouse appears quite well established, it may have been built even earlier

Redesign in 1922 by John Abercromby



John F. Abercromby (1861 - 1935) was a stockbroker by profession and a good amateur golfer. He designed only a few courses but each is recognised for its quality, for example Worplesdon, Coombe Hill, The Addington, Knole Park and Bovey Castle. Sir Henry Cotton (three times Open Champion) said that he was 'one whom posterity may well judge to have been the greatest of golf architects.'

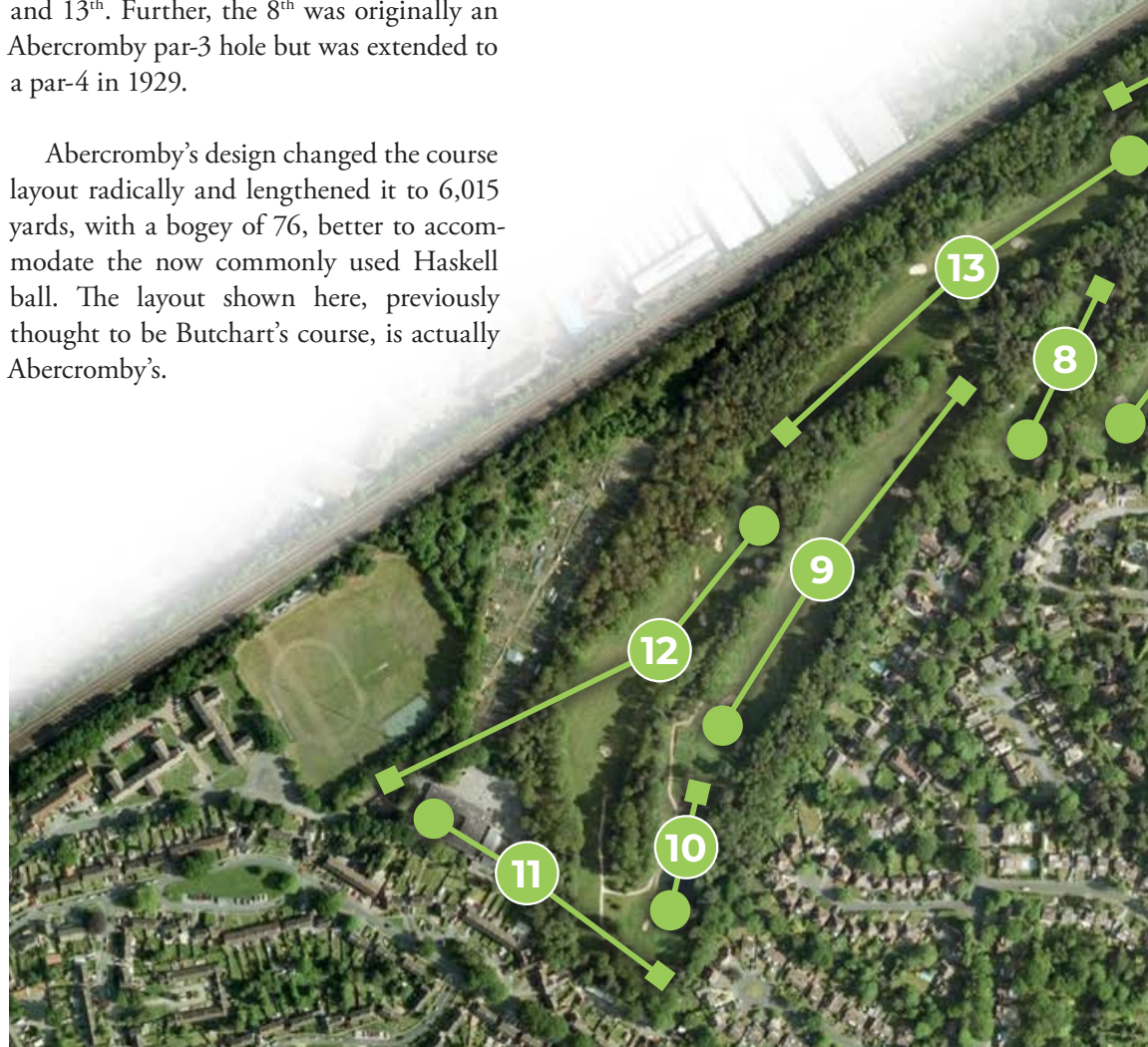
Bleakdown Golf course must have been in a sorry state at the end of the First World War, as it had been the subject of extensive ploughing for food in February 1918 and received little maintenance. Those far-sighted individuals undertaking the purchase of the Club appointed one of the most highly regarded golf course architects in the country to redesign it, John Frederick Abercromby. The great Dr Alister Mackenzie (who, with Bobby Jones, designed Augusta National) said he was '*perhaps the most successful of British golf course architects.*'

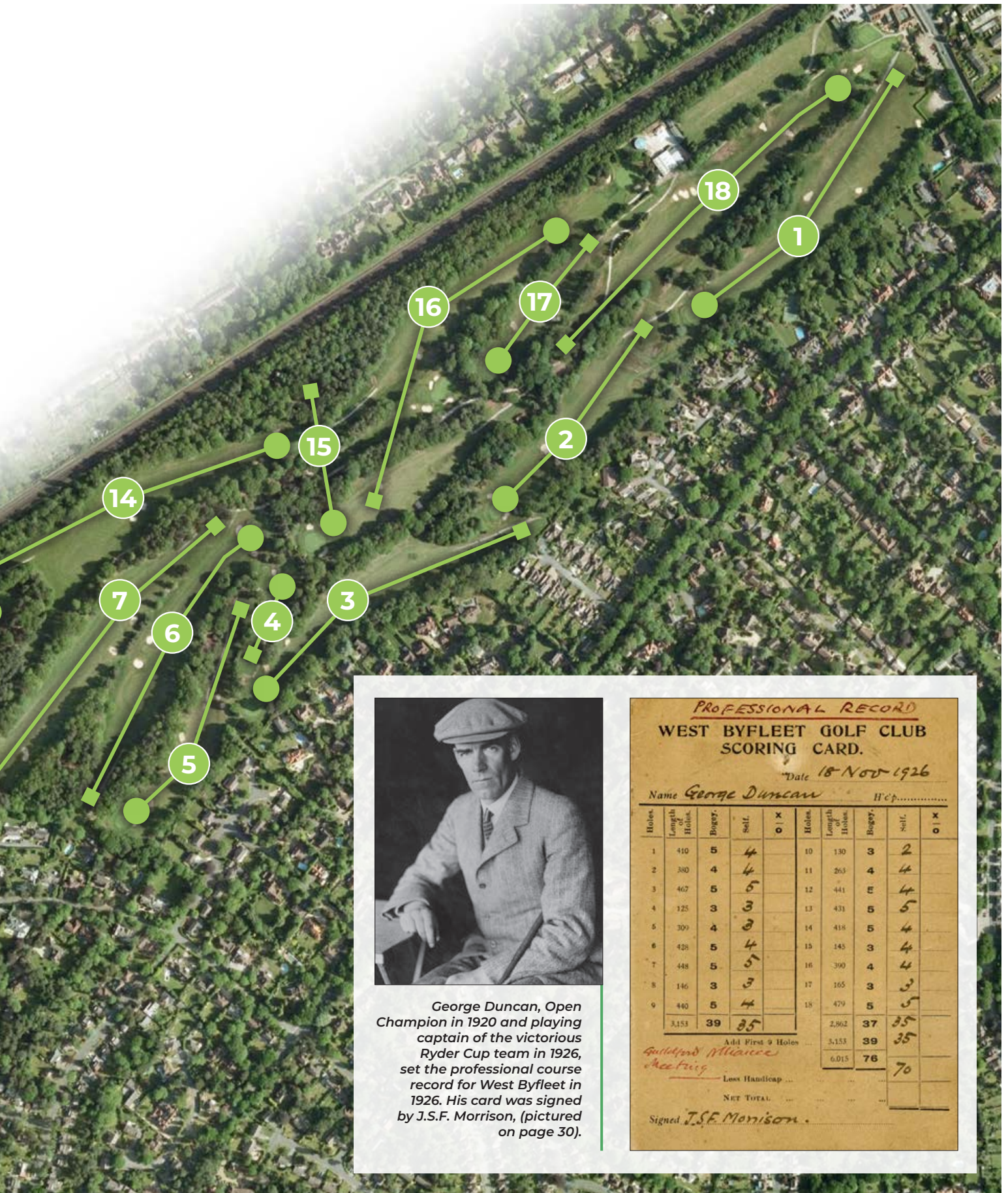
Abercromby was particularly known for his design of par-3 holes. None of Cuthbert Butchart's par-3 holes was retained and the three of Abercromby's that remain have stood the test of time, namely the 4th, 11th and 13th. Further, the 8th was originally an Abercromby par-3 hole but was extended to a par-4 in 1929.

Abercromby's design changed the course layout radically and lengthened it to 6,015 yards, with a bogey of 76, better to accommodate the now commonly used Haskell ball. The layout shown here, previously thought to be Butchart's course, is actually Abercromby's.

In summary, the holes we play today that come from this Abercromby redesign, in terms of shape and much of the greenside bunkering, are: the 3rd, 4th, some of the 7th, the 8th, 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th (last 200 yards of the hole), 15th, 16th and, to a large extent, the 18th.

The review of the course carried out by Mackenzie and Ebert in 2011 also confirmed that, in their view, all but three of our greens date from the 1922 redesign, a further indication of how much we owe to Abercromby. The course changes were well received, the Club attracted many able golfers and an 'Evening Standard' article in 1925 stated: '*Since the course was remodelled by Mr Abercromby it has definitely taken its place as one of the good inland courses.*'





Source: Based on Mackenzie & Ebert 2011 'Audit'. Map data: Google, Bluesky, Getmapping plc, Infoterra Ltd & Bluesky, Landsat/Copernicus, Maxar Technologies, The Geoinformation Group.

Adjustments to the course in the late 1920s and 1930s

MEN'S SECTION.
WEST BYFLEET GOLF CLUB
SCORING CARD.

Name A. J. Lacey Date 19 Nov 1937 HCP +2

Hole	Length Yards	Par	Score	+/-	Hole	Length Yards	Par	Score	+/-
1	410	5	3		10	448	5	4	
2	380	4	4		11	146	3	3	
3	425	5	4		12	400	4	3	
4	125	3	3		13	142	3	3	
5	309	4	4		14	360	4	4	
6	428	4	4		15	425	4	4	
7	520	5	5		16	420	5	4	
8	285	4	5		17	180	3	3	
9	295	4	3		18	505	5	4	
3177 38 35					3026 36 32				
Add First 9 Holes					3177 38				
					6203 74				

Less Handicap ...
Gross Total 67
Signed C. A. Smith Capt. Copy.
Hon Sec. R. W. Alliance

Arthur Lacey's record-breaking card from 1937.

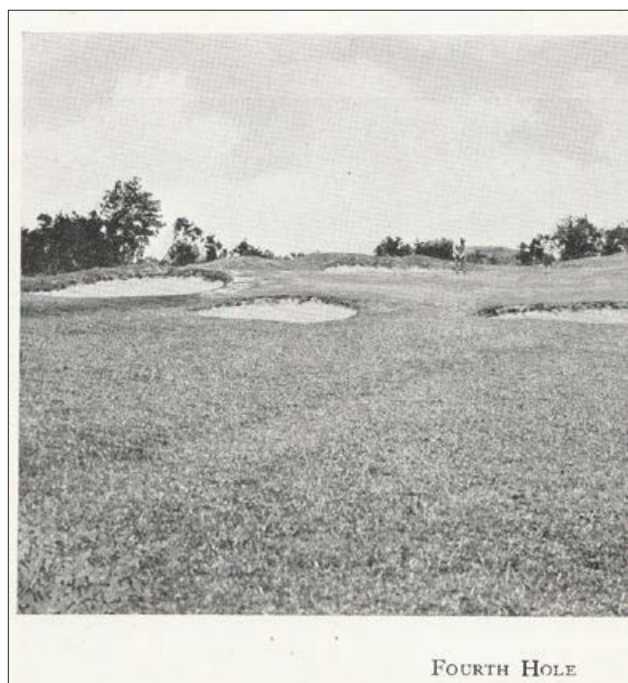


Arthur Lacey (1904 - 1979) was a member of the 1933 and 1937 Ryder Cup teams and captained the 1951 Ryder Cup Team. He won the Belgian and French Opens. When refereeing in The Masters in 1958, he was involved in a controversial ruling, which favoured Arnold Palmer, the eventual winner.

The Club's records show that in 1927 Arthur Croome – then working in partnership with Abercromby and two other great architects of the day, Tom Simpson and Herbert Fowler – was asked to investigate the possibility of rearranging the course layout to enable a second starting point nearer the clubhouse. The following year James Braid, the five-time Open Champion and a prolific course designer, was also invited to help, presumably due to the dissolving of the Fowler, Abercromby, Simpson and Croome partnership following Fowler's bankruptcy in March 1928.

The 11th and 15th holes were eliminated and the 12th and 17th holes were substantially changed, mainly by repositioning the tees. Some of the present 7th and the 9th, 14th and 17th holes were entirely new or the result of changes to existing holes. Of these holes, Club records confirm that the 17th was designed by James Braid. As a result of the redesign, an alternative starting tee was created at the 8th, which was the previous 17th hole extended from 165 yards to 285 yards.

The revised layout was reviewed by Bernard Darwin, who covered golf for 'The Times' from 1907 to 1953, in a 1929 article that was less than complimentary about the changes. With the passage of time, however, reviews became more favourable and in 1934 an article in 'Golf Illustrated', while still having reservations about the 10th and 18th holes, stated that 'West Byfleet is a course capable of testing any player and therefore is worthy of entertaining any player.' It went on to say: 'West Byfleet puts a high premium on intelligence. The right spot upon which to place the initial shot is to be found at every hole and as one deviates from that spot so does one's difficulties grow. There is nothing penal about the course. It is all a matter of sticking to the right line of attack. And that for me will ever spell golf at its highest level.'

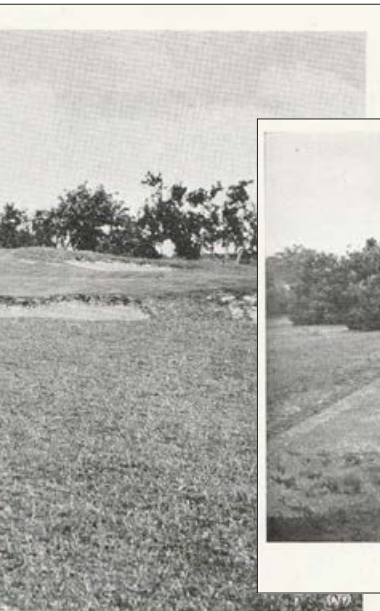


FOURTH HOLE



CLUB HOUSE AND

In 1937 the Club extended the 7th hole to make it 520 yards long by moving the green from just beyond the current cross bunkers to its existing position, where previously there had been stables. In November of the same year, Arthur Lacey, the professional at The Berkshire, playing in a Guildford Alliance



[Golf Clubs Association]

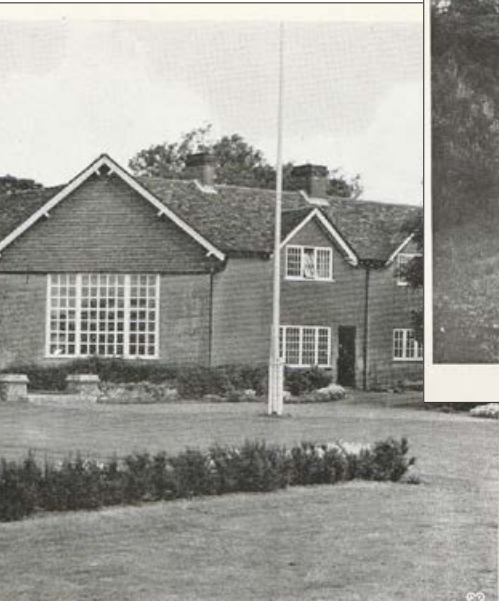


SIXTH HOLE FROM THE TEE [Golf Clubs Association]



ELEVENTH HOLE [Golf Clubs Association]

Photographs of the course taken from Robert Browning's 1938 Handbook for West Byfleet Golf Club.



[Bawtree, "Panchrome," Sutton] PUTTING GREEN.



THIRTEENTH HOLE [Golf Clubs Association]



EIGHTEENTH GREEN AND CLUB HOUSE [Bawtree, "Panchrome," Sutton]

competition, established a new professional record, winning with a gross 67. The report in 'The Times', written presumably by Bernard Darwin, describes this record as being unlikely to be broken for some time. On this occasion the article was much more complimentary about the course.

Second World War

During World War Two, the course was changed in several ways. On every long hole, trees were planted and ditches were dug to prevent gliders and aeroplanes landing. An anti-aircraft battery was placed to the left and in front of the 9th tee, while the fairways on the 6th, 10th and 16th holes were all ploughed to grow vegetables.

The Welsh Guards occupied the clubhouse during the war. Huts were also constructed on the entire length of the 1st hole as a camp for refugees and displaced persons. This meant the 1st hole shared a fairway with the 18th and was played from a tee just short of the 18th green (near the current exit path) to a green in front of today's 2nd tee. The 2nd tee was then to the left of the cedar trees at the rear of the 1st green.

A shortened course of 5,300 yards was played during the war. All major competitions were cancelled except for the Stoop Cup which, until the 2020 pandemic, was unique in being played for continuously during the life of West Byfleet Golf Club.

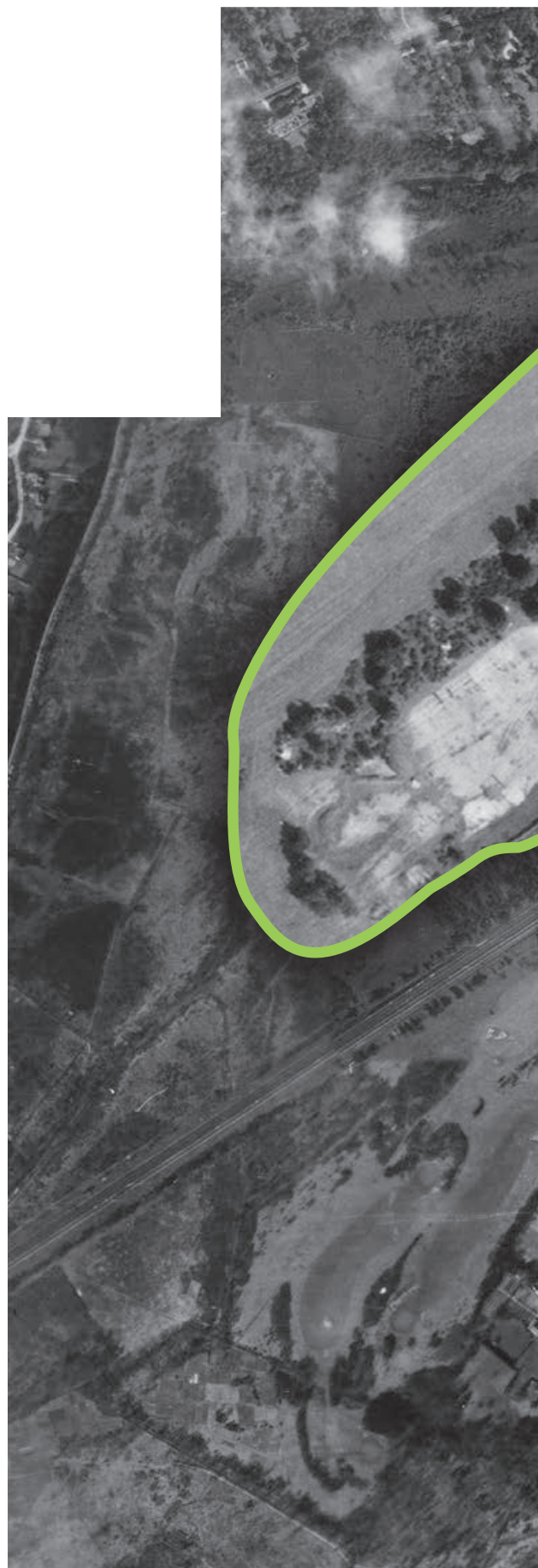


John Morrison DFC (1892 - 1961) recorded his work at West Byfleet in a letter dated November 17, 1949 to Charles Hugh Alison, another partner with Morrison and Colt at the time. A larger-than-life character and a talented sportsman, he won blues at Cambridge for cricket, football and golf. He worked extensively on golf course design on the continent. At home, he is best known for remodelling Prince's and Fulwell after the Second World War.

Postwar reconstruction

The Club again turned to a distinguished golf course architect, John Morrison, to reconstruct the course when most of it, other than the 1st hole, was returned by the authorities in 1948. Morrison had joined Harry Colt's golf design partnership in 1923 and became a director five years later. An excellent amateur golfer and a pilot with the RAF in both World Wars, his contribution to the partnership is often understated in favour of his famous partner Harry Colt. The work largely related to the holes that had been ploughed during the war.

The course was reopened on April 4, 1951 following the completion of Morrison's work, the first time in over 11 years that it had been played to its full length of 6,200 yards.





*Huts built on
the 1st hole*

*6th, 10th and 16th
fairways were
ploughed*

This aerial photograph from 1946, taken by the RAF as part of a nationwide process of assessing bomb damage, shows quite clearly the wartime changes to the course.



Henning and Thomson at West Byfleet GC June 1959.

At that time 300 trees were planted on the course, many to hide the construction of the Sheerwater estate.

However, it was not until 1956 that the authorities released the 1st hole to the Club. The hole was reinstated in 1959 when Peter Thomson, five times Open Champion, and Harold Henning played an exhibition match.

Over the next four decades, the changes

to the course were minor. Successive Greens Committees made adjustments here and there. From time to time they cut back undergrowth and filled in bunkers that were deemed unnecessary. One of the bunkers that was not thought relevant, about 70 yards short of the 12th green to the left of the fairway, had originally been put in place by James Braid. As David Regan, Club professional from 1983 to 2016 remarked, in the US there would be a plaque to mark a bunker placed by a five-time Open Champion, whereas we just quietly remove it!

A more professional approach was adopted at the turn of the millennium when the Club asked two golf course architects, Jonathan Gaunt and Neil Coles, to review the bunkering. Their reports were duly considered and Neil Coles was commissioned to undertake the work of adding some bunkers, removing others and reconstructing all those that remained. New drainage was installed in some and all 80 were lined with upturned turfs. Changes were made to the bunkering on the 1st, 3rd, 9th, 15th and 18th holes.

‘Course Design Audit 2011’ – Mackenzie and Ebert



Martin Ebert (who is the nephew of West Byfleet member Mike Ebert) and Tom Mackenzie started working for Donald Steel in the 1990s and took over his business when he retired. They have undertaken projects on over 200 golf courses worldwide, including Royal Portrush, Royal St George's, Turnberry and Hirono (Japan), considered by some to be the best course in Asia.

While the course at West Byfleet had for many years been highly regarded, increasingly it was thought to be in need of modernisation in several respects. For example, the course was short by modern standards and the placement of fairway bunkers was in need of further review as better players were able to carry them too easily. Accordingly, terms of reference were drawn up in 2010 for a golf course architect to undertake a full evaluation of the course and its playing strategy, covering its strengths and weaknesses, suggestions for improving the placement of hazards, a better risk-reward strategy and the possibility of lengthening some of the holes, as the course was still the same length as in 1937.

The Club consulted the R&A, who suggested that, amongst others, the Club

should consider (Tom) Mackenzie and (Martin) Ebert (M&E) as architects.

The resulting M&E ‘Course Design Audit’ was presented to members in 2011 and again with amendments in 2012. Following these consultations, the Club Committee decided not to proceed with a few of the proposals, principally the planting of swathes of heather around the course and the reduction of the 17th hole off the red tee to 137 yards, but agreed to the report’s main recommendations as follows:

- the enlargement of virtually all the greens, which had over time become smaller and less interesting;
- the strengthening of the course with fairway bunkering placed in positions that test the better players;



- the placement of some greenside bunkers closer to each other thereby calling for a more accurate approach shot;
 - the redesign of many bunkers, making them more visible and distinctive;
 - the creation of more humps, hollows and run-off areas near the greens;
 - providing alternative options to play holes for a better risk-reward strategy, though not to the extent originally envisaged by M&E;
 - increasing the yardage of the course off the back tees from 6,197 to over 6,400 yards; and
- a step change in the way we manage the heathland, to include the encouragement of 'wispy grass' to add definition and character and growing heather where we know it will grow.

A timetable was compiled to complete the work over 10 years. While initially the plan was for work to be undertaken on a hole by hole basis, the changes from 2012 to 2015 were all low-cost and limited mainly to the extension of the greens. However, the 2016 Committee drafted a new work programme, beginning with two new bunkers being installed on the left hand side of the 1st fairway, and swales to the left hand side of the 1st green. Also the 5th hole was extended and new back tees were proposed on several other holes.

Revised bunkering on the 6th to provide a better test for both the drive and approach shot.

Lengthening of holes such as the 15th to restore the original challenge for long hitters. In 1926, the hole was 431 yards, compared with 467 yards off the purple tees today.



8th before (right) and after (below), all bunkers now clearly visible from the tee.



11th before (right) and after (above), greenside bunkers reshaped and green extended beyond the right hand bunker.



Before and after images showing some of the results of the Mackenzie & Ebert redesign

17th before (left) and after (below), the bunkering that surrounds this green is eye-catching.



18th before (left) and after (above), new bunkers on the right hand side of the fairway and on the left hand side of the approach to the green.

Course development plan 2017 - 2022

There was a step change in 2017 when, following changes to the governance of the Club, the newly constituted Board asked Mackenzie and Ebert to review their 2011 'Audit'. The resulting M&E 'Overall Masterplan – August 2017' endorsed the earlier review, with some modest changes, namely extending the distance to the drive bunker on the 14th hole, tightening up the

bunkering at the entrance to two more holes and adding 10 yards to each of seven holes, taking the back tee course to over 6,500 yards.

These changes and a plan to complete the work in five phases by the spring of 2022, in time for the celebrations of the 100th anniversary of the founding of West Byfleet Golf Club, were presented to the members in March 2018 on the basis that the project would be funded from annual income and reserves, with no levies being required. Changes were subsequently made to the redesign of the 2nd hole, following a decision to retain all the cedars behind the 1st green, and to the 4th and 16th greens where poor drainage and excessive shade had been an issue for many years.

With the completion of this work, the course is now fit for the considerable future. From the back (purple) tees, the par is 70, the course rating 71.9 and the slope rating 131; while, for ladies playing from the red tees, the par is 72, the course rating 73.0 and the slope rating 129. With white, yellow and blue tees also available, rated as shown on the left, the choice of five different tees offers an interesting, challenging and enjoyable round of golf to every member, irrespective of their ability.

Many of the changes made by M&E reflect the design principles championed by John Abercromby, whose course we still largely play to this day. 'Golf Tourism England' and 'Golf Monthly' in their September 2021 reviews, praised the course; indeed 'Golf Monthly' said: *'The excellent tree-lined course at West Byfleet is both a strong test and great fun.'*



The West Byfleet Golf Club scorecard, spring 2022.

COMPETITION							Course 71.9 Slope 131									
DATE		START TIME		FINISH TIME		H'Cap Index		Course H'Cap		Playing H'Cap		Course 70.6 Slope 126				
A													M Course 69.1 Slope 120			
B													L Course 74.5 Slope 133			
C													M Course 67.6 Slope 115			
D													L Course 73.0 Slope 129			
Hole	Marker	Purple Yards	White Yards	Yellow Yards	Men's Par	Men's S.I.	Player's Score				Nett Score/Points	Red Yards	Ladies' Par	Ladies' S.I.		
							A	B	C	D						
1		408	404	391	4	10						378	4	11		
2		406	376	354	4	8						331	4	9		
3		438	423	407	4	4						395	4	3		
4		137	127	116	3	18						107	3	17		
5		316	312	290	4	12						279	4	7		
6		427	427	403	4	2						391	4	1		
7		515	510	487	5	6						477	5	5		
8		299	283	265	4	16						246	4	15		
9		357	324	304	4	14						282	4	13		
		3303	3186	3017	36							2886	36	OUT		

PLEASE AVOID SLOW PLAY AT ALL TIMES

10		473	456	438	4	1						428	5	6
11		169	163	153	3	15						140	3	16
12		427	387	377	4	5						346	4	4
13		160	156	135	3	17						120	3	18
14		377	365	345	4	11						319	4	8
15		467	418	407	4	3						394	4	2
16		452	428	417	4	7						401	5	10
17		182	177	154	3	13						144	3	14
18		521	500	489	5	9						469	5	12
		3228	3050	2915	34							2761	36	IN
		3303	3186	3017	36							2886	36	OUT
		6531	6236	5932	70							5647	72	TOTAL
		Stableford Points or Par Result	Holes Won	Holes Lost	Result							PLAYING H'CAP		
												NETT		

Marker's Signature..... Player's Signature.....

PIN POSITIONS FRONT OF GREEN MIDDLE OF GREEN BACK OF GREEN Distances on sprinkler heads represent yards to the middle of the green. 63017 01883 344244

Tee	Men			Ladies		
	Course Rating	Slope Rating	PAR	Course Rating	Slope Rating	PAR
Blue	60.5	99	61	63.0	103	65