

Chapter 5

The Eighties

IN 1980, to implement the recommendations previously agreed by the members, finance was needed to upgrade the existing nine holes and the committee duly held meetings with the Club's bankers in order to raise the required funding. With a loan finally agreed, work commenced and a new era began. The majority of the work was done by the members themselves who, with access to earth moving equipment and heavy plant, spent countless hours clearing scrub, building tees and greens, thus generally putting Hamilton Stutts ideas into practice. This valiant band of golfers, many of whom still retain membership, are the backbone of the present Club and newer members undoubtedly owe much to their hard work and dedication. To this day many of them still form working parties to



The 18th green and clubhouse (1982)

help improve the course conditions, which is possibly unique to The Ashley Wood Golf Club, but epitomizes the spirit within this members club.

1981 saw the completion of the work and The Ashley Wood Golf Club became arguably the finest 9 hole course in the county.

The new layout measured 6227 yards with a standard scratch score of 70.

Hole	Yards	S.I	Par	Hole	Yards	S.I	Par
1	542	7	5	10	525	8	5
2	408	2	4	11	421	1	4
3	462	3	4	12	398	4	4
4	98	17	3	13	114	18	3
5	408	11	4	14	388	10	4
6	384	9	4	15	346	14	4
7	134	15	3	16	150	16	3
8	472	5	4	17	505	6	5
9	259	13	4	18	213	12	3
OUT	<u>3167</u>			IN	<u>3060</u>		
				OUT	<u>3167</u>		
			TOTAL		<u>6227</u>		

At last The Ashley Wood Golf Club was on the map and could no longer be considered a "Pitch and Putt venue", a comment heard more than once in the corridors of power at certain more salubrious clubs. The course



Clubhouse and bar renovations completed (1983)



A shot in the dark. George Phillips holed out at the 4th during night golf (1985)

offered a good test of golf for both the low handicapper and novice, whilst retaining the rural friendliness that the Club was already famous for.

During the previous year it was decided to hold a Charity event in aid of Muscular Dystrophy and the first "Night Golf" to be played in England took place at The Ashley Wood Golf Club. Originally intended for one night only, the event snowballed and by 1986 over two hundred golfers from a wide area were taking part in preliminary heats, held over four

nights, to qualify for the final held on the fifth night.

The tournament was played over a shortened course and golfers could use nothing above an 8 iron. All shots were played in the dark, although



*Hardy B League Winners (1983): Rear; L to R: J Best, C Jeans, R Rogers, F Reid, S Robbins, G Lloyd, A Bailey, M Samways.
Front; L to R: H Rebbek, G Wagstaff, B Cornick, K Durbin, G Bromby*

lights illuminated the flagsticks and torches were allowed to help find the balls.

It was at one of these night tournaments that George Phillips was immortalized. He unwittingly holed his 9 iron tee shot at the 85 yd 4th hole and won a video recorder, donated by Barclays Bank.

Many thousands of pounds were raised for the Charity, but the popularity of the event was to be its eventual downfall. So many people, playing in the dark, inevitably took its toll on the course and the event was finally stopped to prevent further damage.

In 1982, under the captaincy of Keith Durbin, the Club applied to join the Hardy League. This is an inter club league for golf clubs in Dorset and they were duly elected into the B division. The team came runners up in their first year but 1983 saw them go one better and win the league, no mean feat for a club with membership considerably smaller than that of its opposition.

During the same year four top European golfers appeared at the golf club. Manuel Pinero, Manuel Calero, Sam Torrance and John O'Leary held a golf clinic in the morning, followed by an eighteen hole exhibition match after lunch.



*PGA Tour Professionals visit TAWGC (1983)
L to R: T Bishop (Committee member), Manuel Pinero, Manuel Calero,
B Cornick (Club Captain), Sam Torrance, John O'Leary*

None of the players found the course or weather conditions easy to cope with as their scores suggested;

O'Leary / 70, Calero / 72, Pinero / 73, Torrance / 74.

Club captain, Barry Cornick, organised the event and the Pros each received £1000 for their efforts. Sponsorship and gate monies ensured a successful day and a donation was made to the Charity, "Investigation into Cot Deaths".

In 1985 Spencer Taylor became the Club Pro, taking over from Nigel Blenkarne who had a concession to sell golf equipment from a portakabin at the Club. Spencer had served his apprenticeship at Dibden Purlieu Golf Club under Alan Bridge and, at twenty-one years of age, qualified as one of the youngest Professionals on the circuit.

Spencer proved to be an excellent teacher and it can be no coincidence that many of the Juniors he taught have become some of the best golfers within the Club. Over the last three years, for example, Junior or Colt members have won the Club Championship and perhaps here I should mention Jason Howard, who in 1994, won the prestigious title at the ripe old age of fifteen years ten months, possibly the youngest Club Champion on record.

Nick Rodgers, Club Champion for two out of the last three years, holds the old course record of 65 as well as jointly holding the new course record with Colts Jason Howard, Richard Pullen and Junior Stuart Ratcliffe, who have all recorded rounds of 68.

Many of the Juniors, both boys and girls, have represented Dorset in intercounty matches, and with the ultimate destiny of the Club in their hands, the future looks bright.

With the membership steadily increasing during 1987-88, logistical problems were experienced. As the course was still only nine holes it was necessary to close the first tee after two hours play, in order to allow the early starters to continue the second half of their rounds. Although perhaps a little inconvenient, this enforced delay caused a unique camaraderie to build up within the clubhouse by members waiting to go out and do battle.

Washing and changing facilities were once again stretched to the limits and water shortages regularly experienced. The original bore hole, sunk by Roy Carey nearly forty years earlier, had been contaminated by a diesel spillage and the Club had relied on local utilities for their supplies. During the summer, with local farmers watering their crops, supplies to the club's

water storage facilities were often totally exhausted leaving both the course and clubhouse arid. It was a common sight to see water bowsters delivered to alleviate the problem but it was obvious that this situation could not continue indefinitely.

At the 1989 December AGM it was agreed by the members to have a new bore hole sunk and in June 1990 contractors began the excavation. It was necessary to bore to a final depth of 450 ft in order to find sufficient water, but the work was duly completed in July 1990 at a cost of £16,000.

In July 1990 exploratory meetings took place between the Club and John and James Cossins, who were the lessors for the land on which the majority of the golf course stood. The meetings were to discuss the possibility of extending the course to eighteen holes by purchasing the land currently leased from the owners and taking up new leases on their land adjacent to the existing course. After much consultation, plans and costs were provisionally agreed, but in the true traditions of a members club, the committee proposals had to be approved by the majority of the membership. A general meeting was organized for such a major decision and a large turn out was rightly anticipated.



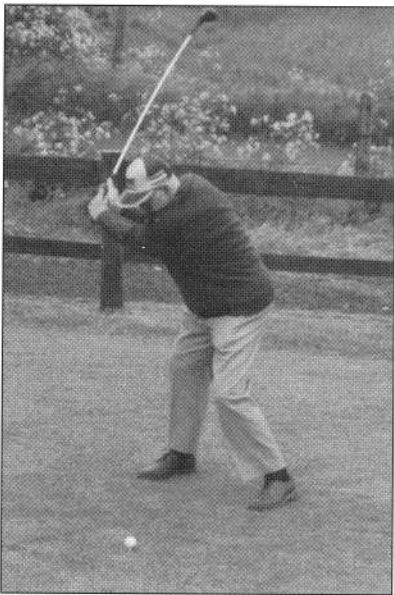
Trustees sign the leases for the new course (1992). L to R: K Edwards, D King, J Sneary

An EGM, chaired by Harold Rebbeck, was held on 21st February 1991 at Blandford Upper School. The meeting was attended by well over two hundred members and, after much discussion, the vast majority accepted the proposals. Ken Sanger, the committee member responsible for development, Reg Harvey, Club Treasurer and Peter Lillford, Club Secretary/Manager began negotiations with bankers to raise the £450,000 required.

Additional funding was raised by some members taking up life memberships, whilst Ashley and Mel Hunt ran "development competitions" which raised very nearly £2,000.

With the loan secured, leases and contracts were eventually signed by the Trustees on 22nd February 1992 and work commenced on the new nine holes. The development was entrusted to The Patrick Tallack organisation from Surrey who, with committee approval, designed and carried out the project.

Huge earth moving equipment was employed to transform the fields into interesting, demanding golf holes and thousands of saplings were planted, many donated by members or societies.

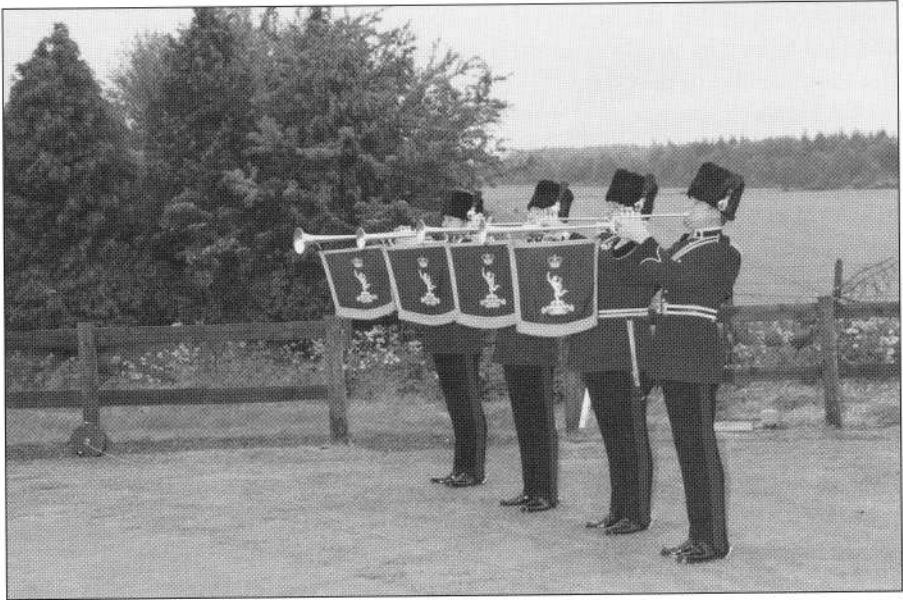


Bob Hyde

With the eighteenth hole being altered from a par 4 to a par 3, it was decided to utilize the old redundant tee area and a practice ground was made available to the members. This incorporated a safety net running alongside the main Wimborne road, a double practice net, sand bunker and chipping area.

And so it was, that at 11am on the 7th May 1994 and almost one hundred years from its inception, The Ashley Wood Golf Club became an eighteen hole golf course for the first time.

A large crowd assembled to hear a fanfare by the Royal Signals Band herald in the Club Captain, Frank Reid, who thanked all those who had worked so hard to achieve the impossible dream. Further speeches were made by



Opening of the new course (1994)

the Chairman Harold Rebbeck and Haydn White, both stalwarts of the club, before witnessing octogenarian Bob Hyde, the Club President, strike the first ball down the fairway, which he did with unerring accuracy. There followed a stableford competition, aptly named the Celebration Cup, played for over the new course with well over one hundred members taking part. K Grimshaw, N Jones and M Budden were the divisional winners and a buffet dance in the evening completed the successful launch of the eighteen holes. In order to show off the new layout, invitations were extended to all other golf clubs in Dorset and an open competition was held in which twenty-five teams competed for glory. The eventual winners were Mid-Dorset but all who took part that day agreed the course was excellent and that The Ashley Wood Golf Club was the real winner.

Because of advertising and media coverage, membership was steadily increasing and behind the scenes the committee realized that the Club had outgrown the clubhouse.

In 1993 plans had been drawn up and passed by the District Council for an extension to the clubhouse but had to be held in abeyance due to the high costs of such an enterprise. It was generally agreed that the members

should not pay for the required improvements as they were already being charged a levy, in addition to their annual subscription, in order to finance the loan for the new course.

Overcrowded changing and toilet facilities were the order of the day until, in 1994, a change in the law came to the rescue.

Until 1994, VAT had been charged on all leisure activities, including golf, but the Government decided to alter the law and subsequently the Customs and Excise Department repaid millions of pounds back into the public sector. Until then, Value Added Tax had been payable on both Joining Fees and Annual Subscriptions but with this change of heart clubs were entitled to a refund, backdated from 1991.

The committee saw a golden opportunity to fund the improvements to the clubhouse from this windfall, but the members would first have to waive their possible right to any monies due to them. Every member, past and present at that time, was sent a letter explaining the position and asking them to forego their refunds. Over ninety percent of those polled agreed to the idea, reasoning that they had already spent the money and therefore wouldn't miss it.

Plans were quickly formulated and in April 1995, Haydon & Co of Bournemouth started the improvements to the clubhouse. The work included building new ladies and gents changing rooms, secretary's office and entrance hall, refurbishing the lounge and extending the kitchen and professional shop.

By the middle of June 1995, and with minimal disruption, the work had been completed and an excellent facility was in full use.

This appeared to be the last piece in a huge jigsaw. From the embryonic ideas of a bored landowner to a multi million pound investment, The Ashley Wood Golf Club has survived where, at times, people had thought it would perish.

Over the years it has championed many good causes. Charities are selected annually and benefit from the generosity of the club members who donate thousands of pounds to people less fortunate. Last year, as an example, over £3,000 was raised for The Wessex Hospice Appeal, which is a Charity set up to care for terminally ill children.