

THE
SUNNINGDALE
GOLF CLUB.

Bernard Darwin

An extract from "The
Golf Courses of the
British Isles" 1910

An extract from "Golf Courses of the British Isles" by Bernard Darwin, describing a round at Sunningdale and published in 1910

Of all these comparatively young courses, the two best-known are probably Sunningdale and Walton Heath. Sunningdale was designed by Willie Park, who is an architect of very pronounced characteristics, though Sunningdale is not perhaps quite so clearly to be recognized as his handiwork as some of his other courses such as Huntercombe or Burhill. It was laid out in what proved to be the last days of the gutty ball, though there was then no whisper of the revolution that was coming to us across the Atlantic.

It was a long course, really a fearfully long course for an ordinary mortal. The two long holes were doubtless two shot holes for Braid, but they had a way of expanding themselves into two drives and a reasonable iron shot for less gifted players. And I cannot help thinking that the coming of the Haskell ball was a blessing to the course, and that it may be said of Sunningdale as it can be said for perhaps no other course in Christendom, that it was improved by the rubber cored ball.

The holes are still quite long enough and if we accomplish any considerable number of them in four strokes apiece we shall be justified in a modified amount of swagger, but we need no longer risk an internal injury in trying to reach the green with our second shot. Of all the inland courses Sunningdale is perhaps the richest in really fine two shot holes, where a brassy or cleek shot lashed right home onto the green sends a glow of satisfaction through the golfers frame. Almost as surely as the two shot holes at Sunningdale constitute its strength, the short holes are the weakness of this course Really good and interesting short holes add a crowning

glory to a golf course, and that, I think, Sunningdale lacks. It resembles in that respect another fine course, Deal, where the longer holes are admirable and the short holes are almost totally wanting in distinction. The short holes at Sunningdale are, however, much better than they used to be, for there was a time when they might have been rather scathingly dismissed as consisting of two practically blind shots on to artificial table lands, and a third entirely blind shot onto a bad sloping green: But this third reproach at least has now been entirely wiped away.

Let us now begin at the first tee and duly admire the view over a vast expanse of wild, undulating, heathery country, with more houses on it now than anyone except the ground landlord would like to see, and clumps of fir trees here and there, one especially on a little knoll, which makes a pleasant landmark in the distance.



Jack White, 1904 Open Champion and the first Sunningdale professional

The next thing to do is to hit the ball, which should be a comparatively easy task, for there is plenty of room at his first hole, as there always should be, and nothing but an egregious top or a wholly unprovoked slice is likely to harm us. It really is, from the point of view of the greatest happiness of the greatest number, a wholly admirable

first hole, since not only is there no great opportunity for disaster, but the hole is a long hole and so enables the couples to be dispatched quickly and without undue irritation from the tee. It is just a steady, easygoing five hole, two drives and a pitch, a mere prelude to the beginning of serious business at the second.

This second is a really good hole. The tee shot has to be played at an unpleasant difficult angle and if we slice we may find ourselves in some innocent house-holder's front garden while in endeavouring to avoid such a trespass that we shall most probably pull it into a region of ruts and heather. If we avoid both forms of errors, we have still the second shot to play, long and straight and of an aspect most formidable, for the avenue of rough down which we drive narrows as it approaches the green and there is an indefinable temptation to slice: Altogether a fine hole, and on the easiest of days we may be thoroughly pleased with a four, a figure we ought to repeat at the third.

This third is of no vast length, but it is an excellent example of those holes whereat there is much virtue in the placing of the tee shot. There is a bunker that pokes and nuzzles with its nose into the left-hand or top edge of the green and he who pulls his drive ever so slightly will have a most difficult pitch to play it over this bunker onto a somewhat slippery and sloping green that runs away from him. On the other hand, the man who has had the courage to skirt the rough on the right hand side of the course, very bad rough it is too, will be rewarded by a fairly simple run-up shot, and moreover, the slope of the green makes a cushion against which he may play his shot boldly. The fourth is a short hole on a plateau green some way above the player. The plateau is reasonably small and well guarded, and the shot in a cross wind is sufficiently difficult, but the bottom of the pin is out of the players sight and he needs much local knowledge to

be sure whether he is ten yards short or stone dead. A better hole than it was, maybe, but not quite worthy of Sunningdale yet. The fifth and sixth are beautiful holes and, and the tee shot to the fifth sends the blood coursing more briskly through the veins. There is exhilaration in driving from a height and rushing thence down a

steep place on to the course which cannot be gainsaid. The more scientific may point out that there is no justification in such emotion and that we have far less on which to prove ourselves than if we had struck our tee shot from the flat. The fact remains that hitting off a high place, if it be not done too often and we are not too scant of breath, is wholly delightful. The difficulty is that we are so intoxicated with the situation that we hit much too hard and the ball totters feebly down the hillside, suffering from a severe wound in the scalp.

The drive from this particular high place having been safely accomplished, there is an accurate second shot, which varies greatly in length according to the winds, to be played between a pond on the right and a bunker on the left. Some will pitch it and pitch into the pond; others will run it and ran into the bunker, and Mr Colt will play a particular low, scuffling shot right onto the pin and win it from us in a four, which will very nearly be a three.

Another wonderfully good two-shot hole is the sixth, where the green lies in the angle of a wood, and we must hold our second shot well up to the left so that the ball shall trickle slowly down the sloping green towards the hole. That is supposing we have hit a straight tee shot, a thing by no means certain, for there is a horribly attractive clump of fir trees to the left which catches many and which once proved particularly fatal to Jack White in a big match against Tom Vardon. The seventh is a bone of contention, some averring that it is a fine

‘sporting’ hole, while others have no names too bad for it. When not alluded to with profanity it is generally known as the “Switchback” hole. Those who like a blind tee shot and a blind second will admire it, and those who do not, will not, and there is the whole matter in a very small compass.

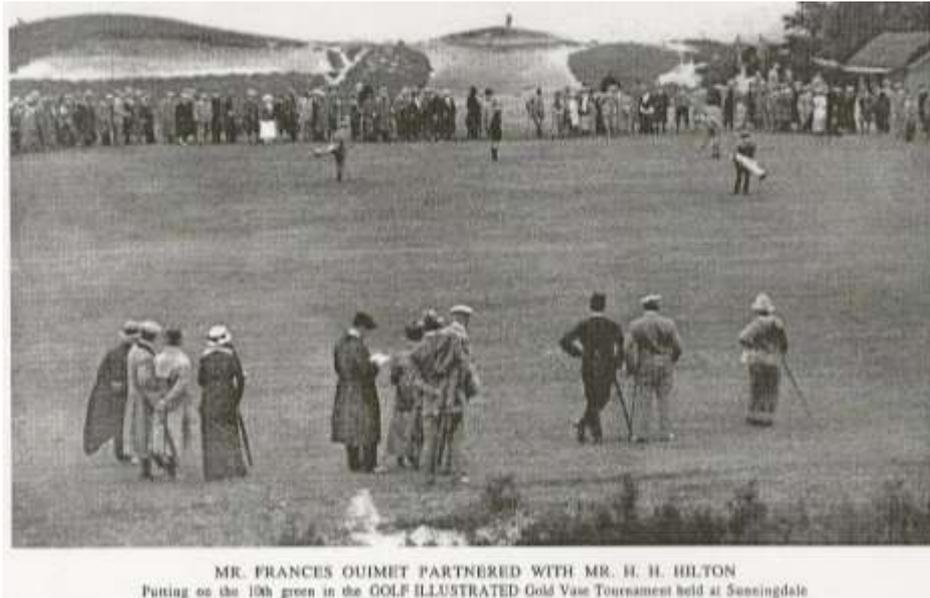
The eighth is quite a good short hole now. It used to be bad, and blind, and stupid, and the ninth we may skip, although there is a fine straight tee shot needed, and then from the tenth tee we drive down another steep place into the lower country. Those who make a loud outcry when they drive “a perfect tee shot, Sir, straight on the pin,” and find it in a bunker may here have cause for annoyance.



This Harry Rountree water colour of the tenth hole of Sunningdale Old Course is included in Darwin's book: It was also used as the picture on the cover. Two half way huts are visible as is the large bunker at the 11th hole

There is no bunker on the straight line, but there are bunkers to right and left and a somewhat narrow space between them and a shot that is very, very nearly well hit sometimes finds a resting place in one or other of them

It is a poor thing, however, to demand perfect immunity for any respectable drive, and the shot that is placed where it ought to be gives the chance for a really fine second shot between more bunkers onto a green of fascinating but fiendish undulations. At the back of the green is a hut, where live ginger beer and apples and other things, and he who has done the hole in four fully deserves them.

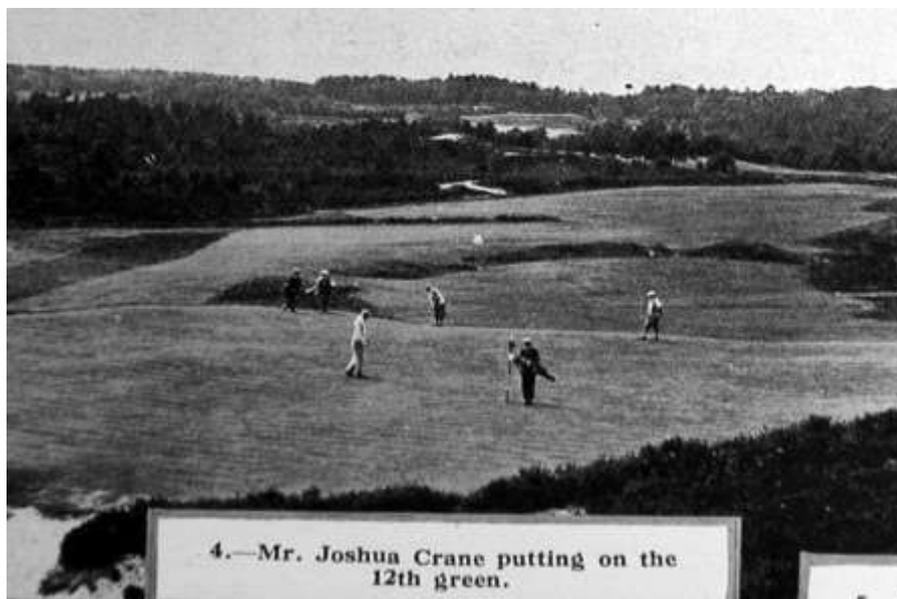


MR. FRANCES OUMET PARTNERED WITH MR. H. H. HILTON
Putting on the 10th green in the GOLF ILLUSTRATED Gold Vase Tournament held at Sessingdale

The tenth green of Old course with ginger beer hut

This tenth hole will be celebrated in golfing history for a truly tremendous second shot played by Braid out of the left-hand bunker in the final round of the News of the World tournament, his opponent being Edward Ray. Poor Ray! He had a perfect tee shot and a perfect second, laid his third stone dead, and yet lost the hole, for Braid, having driven into the left-hand bunker from the tee, gallantly took his iron for his second, reached the green with a terrific shot, and completed the roll of his infamies by holing his putt for a three. Provided we do not top our tee shot into a formidable sandy bluff, the eleventh should be done in four, with a chance of a three. And the twelfth should be another four, if only we can be straight enough from the tee. This is a hole to be

approached warily and in instalments, and the prudent man generally takes a cleek or a spoon from the tee and even then breathes a fervent thanksgiving if his ball lies clear, since the fairway narrows down to a horribly small point.



This photo shows the Old 12th green after Colt's alteration in 1910, and at the time of this Darwin book. For the first ten years the green was down on the flat area to the left of the picture and opposite what was then stables

The thirteenth, as I said, was once one of the very worst holes in the world and is now a thoroughly attractive one. The player must produce some such stroke whereby the ball shall sit resolutely down on a slanting green surrounded by bunkers, and stay there. The fourteenth is a two shot hole for Mr Angus Hambro, and rather more for most other people, save under favourable conditions

Then comes another short hole, I should have said there were four and not three, but this is a long short hole, and a wooden club shot is often needed, and when that wooden club shot has to be held up into a stiff right-hand wind, the difficulties of the situation are not easily to be overrated.

Then we face homewards with three good long holes, all of which may be done in fours, although most people would thankfully strike a bargain with Providence for two fours and a five. The most difficult of the three, as is only right and fitting, is seventeenth hole, and here Mr Colt has worked a great transformation and turned a hole that once possessed no merits whatsoever into a thoroughly good one, with a most difficult second shot, one of those shots which produce an instinctive and fatal tendency to slice.

After that, two good, straight, steady shots should get us safely onto the home green, and we have finished at last. If we have done a score which is perceptibly lower than eighty, we have done well. If we have not been too frequently up to our necks in untrodden heather, nay, even if we have, we ought to have enjoyed ourselves immensely.

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