

HEATON PARK GOLF COURSE

Heaton Hall and accompanying grounds were purchased by Manchester City Council in 1901 from John Egerton, the then Earl of Wilton, for the sum of £300,000. Contrary to popular conception, there were no caveats or stipulations that consultations should take place with the Manchester public regarding any changes or alterations to the grounds or the hall.

Heaton Park opened to the public as a municipal recreation area in 1904. A centenary exhibition to mark this milestone took place in Heaton Hall in 2004. Heaton Park Golf Club played a small part in this by exhibiting its premier trophy, The Sir Charles Behrens Trophy, along with the original minute book which has a record of the formation of the club, plus the original members book containing the names of founding members.

Heaton Park Golf Course was designed by John Henry Taylor, who had only recently won The Open Championship, and went on to win the title again in 1913, making him a 5 times winner. In modern times, it's difficult to perceive a top tournament professional being involved in the design and construction of courses whilst still at the peak of their game. When John Henry Taylor won The Open in 1909, the runner-up was Tom Ball. Tom was the brother of Sidney Ball, the first professional to be appointed at Heaton Park Golf Course in 1913. Perhaps there was some kind of irony there.

The course was officially opened on September 7th 1911 by the Lord Mayor of Manchester, Sir Charles Behrens. (See photo from the Daily Sketch). Many dignitaries and officials attended and an exhibition match took place, which included John Henry Taylor himself. Heaton Park Golf Club is in possession of the club that was used to play the first shot, currently in the safe keeping of the Hon. Secretary, Mr. Dave Garrett.



The golf course is slightly different now than when it opened in 1911. The original first and second holes no longer exist. The first tee was originally situated opposite the front entrance to the hall. Some people wrongly identify the front of the hall as that which overlooks the park, and has large windows giving panoramic views. That is the back of the hall. Heaton Park Golf Club originally had a clubroom next to the front entrance, which in those days, would have been opposite the first tee. The club had to vacate this room in 1983 due to renovations taking place in the hall. Players would tee off for the first hole towards what is now the 17th green. The second hole was situated on what is now the pitch and putt, the original green still being in use and might answer some people's bafflement as to why one of the greens is so large for a pitch and putt.

Having played the first two holes, members would then play towards what is now the 18th green, but would play the approach shot from the right, in other words, at right angles to the current direction of play. This might answer some players' questions as to why there is a catchment slope on the left of the green, the original intention being to collect the balls that were played towards it, from the right. Other features that were changed was the re-location of the 7th & 8th tees. The 7th tee (now the 4th) was originally a raised tee, located directly behind what is now the 4th green and was moved due to concerns raised by residents of Old Hall Lane that golf balls were damaging their property, so a new tee was constructed, next to the lane, behind what was The Three Arrows pub and currently has the white stone marker for the 4th hole. The original tees for the old 8th hole are still visible, at the side of the current 7th green. These were determined to be in a dangerous position, so the tee was moved back, up the hill, to its' present location, where it is now the 5th tee.

Members may not be aware that there are some stone steps up the hill to the left of the current 15th hole, between the 15th green and the 16th tee. These steps were constructed as a means of exiting the course after playing the last hole, now the 15th. They were well used, as there is plenty of wear from constantly being trodden by golf shoes.

This layout was changed in 1935, when Manchester City Council installed the entrance road that enters the park at the side of Smithy Lodge. Incidentally, called Smithy Lodge because there used to be a blacksmiths' forge located on the spot where the bus stop now stands, just outside the entrance, on Middleton Road. The change meant that holes 1 & 2 had to be incorporated on the "course side" of the new entrance road. As a result, the 3rd hole became the 1st, and new holes were created for the 17th and 18th, now the 16th & 17th.

Following the construction of the present clubhouse in 1995, known as The Golf Pavilion, a franchise was awarded to a private company to manage the course and the facilities. The company subsequently organised a refurbishment of 16 tees in 1997, which included moving 6 of them to new locations, and an adjustment of the holes whereby they were advanced on the scorecard by one hole, ie, the old 1st became the 18th, the 2nd became the 1st etc., which is the current situation. Completely new tees were built at the following holes: 1, 3, 8, 11, 12 and 18, and the remainder were refurbished. This meant a major change for the 11th hole, where the tee had previously been located behind, and to the right of, the 10th green. It's new location now being to the left of the 10th green. The slope at the

back of the green previously faced the 11th tee and players today must wonder why the catchment slope seems to be parallel to the line of the tee, rather than facing it.



This is the view from the old 11th tee.

At the same time these changes were taking place, one bunker was removed from the left hand side of the 3rd green and from either side of the 5th green. In more recent times, other bunkers have been removed but there used to be a large bunker in front of what is now the first tee. Mr Secretary is in possession of a large photograph taken in 1927 on Ladies Day which shows members sitting in front of this bunker for a group photo.

The course is now unrecognisable from when it first opened in 1911, due to extensive tree growth. For the first 75 years, there were hardly any trees on the course, except for the rhododendrons around the ponds. In 1987, there was an EU initiative which urged golf clubs in the UK to plant as many saplings as possible in an attempt to replace tree losses. Heaton Park participated in this, and it was alleged there were financial incentives for doing so. But they were only allegations. As a result, there are now lots of tree-lined fairways where previously there weren't any.

In 1984, Manchester City Council decided to use the valley to the right of the now 10th hole, for the purposes of landfill. Although this area has always been out of bounds, it was disappointing to see it being spoiled in this way. However, plant and tree growth have now covered it up but some highly toxic material was dumped there, which resulted in several

vent pipes being installed. These are visible during winter months, when plant growth has receded.

I have tried to compile this history from the minute books and from my experience of speaking to lots of members in the past, who, sadly, are no longer with us, plus my own experiences of course. It was frustrating not to be able to have the assistance of Park Management, who I did ask for help, but I am aware that in the last couple of years there have been other priorities for them. It was also disappointing to find nothing in the records at The Central Library in Manchester, except financial records of daily takings. However, I hope any members who read this will find it interesting and if anyone has items that they think are worth adding, then please let me know. Thank you.

Vinny Marcroft.

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