

ROYAL BIRKDALE Golf Course

The name Hawtree has for more than fifty years been closely linked with Royal Birkdale, the Open Championship venue. Three generations of Hawtree have worked on the famous course and are part of its history.

In 1922 a seven-year plan was put into operation to prepare the course for Championship standard. This involved the building of a new Clubhouse (which was opened in the summer of 1935), and also a grand remodelling of the design of the course.



In 1931 the Club employed F. G. Hawtree and J. H. Taylor Ltd, one being a prominent golf course architect and the other a player who had dominated the Open Championship during the 20 year period immediately prior to the First World War. They carried out the total reconstruction of the 18 hole course for a sum of £3,979/10s/0d. Their philosophy was to lay out holes in the valleys between the sandhills rather than over them. This enabled Birkdale to gain the reputation of being one of the fairest of the championship courses. They designed a course which was tough, but fair. It rewarded the straight hit, but punished the wayward shot with its surrounding buckthorn and dwarf willow scrub. The fairways threaded through the valleys and this left the mighty sand dunes as perfect natural vantage points for spectators.

In the sixties, with the growing popularity of golf as a spectator sport, drastic changes were made after the 1961 Open: updating the Clubhouse, and catering for the vast hordes of people who wanted to partake in the atmosphere around the links. These vast legions needed to watch play in comparative ease and comfort without hindering



play. The course was extensively updated; Hawtree and Taylor could not have envisaged the rise in popularity of the game.

F. W. Hawtree designed the new short twelfth hole for the 1965 Open and made a number of alterations to the layout.

In 1993, Martin Hawtree re-contoured all 18 greens. During the 1991 Open Championship at Royal Birkdale there was considerable discussion about the quality of the greens and the consequent effect on putting. It had been appreciated for several years that there were underlying problems with the greens and after the Open Championship the club took the brave decision to dig up, re-design and relay all 18 greens. Club officials decided to discover the causes and find a cure for the worst-affected greens.

Five trial greens were chosen, the turf was removed from all five greens and the topsoil amended. The greens were re-turfed with the same turf.



'A tremendous change'
Greenkeeper International March 1994

Such was the success of this initial programme that the club decided to reconstruct the remaining thirteen greens.

Whilst the primary aim of the reconstruction was to eradicate problems of rootzone and drainage the opportunity was seized to integrate more closely the design of the greens with their surrounds, which in the process introduced more complex contouring of the putting surface. The reconstructed greens were ready for the 1998 Open at Royal Birkdale. In 2005 Royal Birkdale is to host the 2005 Amateur Championship.