

# HOYLAKE, WHERE A PREMIUM IS SET ON ACCURACY

*The Royal Liverpool Golf Club Will Be Hosts to the British Amateur Championship in May*

By BERNARD DARWIN

**H**OYLAKE, the home of the Royal Liverpool Golf Club, which is to be the scene of this year's British Amateur Championship and at which we hope to welcome so many invaders at once friendly and formidable from your side, is one of the historic courses of England. With Westward Ho! it shares much of the credit for the first "boom" of golf in England—now away back in the seventies. It was the scene of the first unofficial Amateur Championship and of the first Amateur International match between England and Scotland. Also it has produced three of the finest golfers that ever lived—John Ball, Harold Hilton and the late Jack Graham. There is no more hospitable or friendly club than the Royal Liverpool, none more go-ahead and enterprising nor any that has more justly "a guid conceit of itself."

However, this is not an historical disquisition, but a description of the course on which your champions will be playing. What sort of a course is Hoylake? In the first place, it is a course that grows on you. At first sight, especially in the rare event of there being no wind, it may seem dull and disappointing. Certainly the moment of stepping out of the slow little train from Liverpool is a little depressing. You have come perhaps with romantic notions, you are to see a battlefield of giants, the home of that great legendary figure, John Ball. What you in fact see is an ugly, well-to-do residential suburb, and you get out along a dull, ugly road cooped in on either side by houses, and peering in vain for any sight of links or sea. From the clubhouse balcony you get your first look at the links, and this first look discloses a big, flat stretch of turf, with houses running along one side of it, cut up here and there with odd little ramparts of turf: a patch of rushes here and there and apparently nothing much else except in the distance a row of sand hills. You may be still further cast down by being told that the sand hills play only a very small part in the golf. "Dear me," you think to yourself, though you are too polite to say it to your host, "it looks as if you could drive as crooked as you like, top your tee shots and scuttle your approaches along the ground and yet come to no particular harm." Go out

and play, however, and you will very soon change your mind.

The only part of that first—and quickly disappearing—impression that is at all true is that you can top a few tee shots and if you are lucky avoid considerable punishment, though you will lose valuable distance. The rest is entirely fallacious; as a general rule it is most important to drive straight at Hoylake, and assuredly you cannot play your approach shots along the ground. Hoylake is one of the strongholds of the old-fashioned cross bunker. You must be able to play your pitches well and crisply

there, for in front of many of the greens, guarding the whole breadth of them, are these "riband" bunkers, not decorative, perhaps, with no claims to landscape gardening beauty, but thoroughly unpromising and efficient. At one time, when golfing "architecture" was in its infancy, the cross bunker was erected here, there and everywhere so stupidly and so much by rule of thumb that it acquired a very bad reputation. A good deal of this odium was undeserved, and when it is judiciously placed, as it is at Hoylake, there is a great deal to be said for it. How wonderfully effective it is, for example, at an eighteenth hole, that there is nobody who is not just a little afraid of it at that crucial moment. You may not go into it, perhaps, but your fear of it makes you play an "over at any price shot." You go over the green as well and need a five when you ought to have a four.



THE PUNCHBOWL OR NINTH HOLE HAS A TYPICALLY LARGE GREEN



Photographs by Sport & General

A WATER HAZARD AND BUNKER WHICH GUARD THE FIFTH HOLE

This is eminently characteristic of the home hole at Hoylake. There is nothing much in the way of your tee shot. The hole, however, is of a good length and in front of the green is a wide, sandy trench that you are not going to jump. There is nothing showy about it; just like the home holes at Muirfield and Westward Ho! which are on very similar lines, it makes a fine, testing dramatic finish. I shall always remember one scene at this home hole. It was in the qualifying round of the Open Championship. After the great J. H. Taylor had had a very bad time of it, he at last seemed to have weathered the storm and to be safe in port, for he had only to do that last hole in five to qualify. He hit a fine tee shot and then, with his trusty iron, did the one thing that

nobody dreamed of, plumped his ball into the cross bunker. He got it out, hit over the green, put his fourth by no means dead, and then holed a really brave putt. So he qualified by the skin of his teeth, and I am not sure that after all that bunker did not win him the championship. Inspired, perhaps, by his escape, he played next day like one possessed, and won in the end by eight clear strokes from Ray.

These iron bunkers are one feature of the course. Another consists of the little ram-parts I mentioned, locally known as "cops." As a rule there is a sandy ditch at the foot of the cop, and when the ball lies in sand wedged light against the turf wall, you are in a thoroughly unpleasant predicament. There is one hole, the short fourth, specially called "The Cop," where there is one cop in front of the tee and another in front of the green, but, generally speaking, it is rather the functions of the cop to punish the crooked rather than the topped ball. There is constantly a cop running on one side of the course or the other—with, as it seems, a horrible power of drawing the ball to its embraces—and it is one of the main reasons for driving as straight as you possibly can at Hoylake.

A third feature, not perhaps altogether a good one, but one which has a great effect on the play, is the prevalence of "out of bounds." Right in front of the clubhouse is a big, flat enclosure called "The Field," and surrounded by cops, with their attendant sandy ditches. This is



LOOKING OUT OVER THE SEA ACROSS THE HIGH TWELFTH TEE  
It is often wise to listen for a lull in the wind before you attempt to drive



THE FOURTH HOLE IS ONLY A FULL MID-IRON BUT, OH, MY!  
With a cop in front of the tee, another at the green and a hollow behind



Photographs by Sport & General

THE GREEN OF THE SHORT ELEVENTH OR FAMOUS ALPS HOLE  
It has a bad reputation because a blind shot over a big sand hill is called for

out of bounds, and nothing is easier than to go into it with your second shot at the first hole. Incidentally I hold a unique, if disgraceful, record, at this first hole. Horace Hutchinson and I had once to go to the nineteenth in a championship. He put two balls out of bounds, but I put so many that I had to give up the match for want of ammunition. However, to continue. At the third you can hook out of bounds. So you can at the sixth, where you must drive over a hedge and the corner of an orchard and where two finalists in the championship once holed out in nine strokes apiece. You do the same thing at the seventh and the eighth, and finally, after some little surcease on the way home, you can slice into that same diabolical old field at the sixteenth and into the high road—possibly even into the Royal Hotel at the seventeenth.

There is one more characteristic of the course which always impresses me, but it is less definite and so much more difficult to describe. It is really something. I suppose. in the nature of the turf, but it always seems to me rather more pertaining to personal devilry in the course. I should call it an unkind course. There never appear to be any pleasant, beneficent little turns and runs in the ground which help your ball on toward the green. You are always being kicked away somewhere when you don't want to go unless—and this is the saving grace—you have struck the ball quite truly. In fact, the ground is just a little  
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humpy and full of ridges, sometimes a little hard and bare; that sort of ground is always hard—and quite right, too—on the ball struck feebly and inaccurately. In saying this I am assuming that Hoylake next spring will be as it used to be. Last year it was for the time being a new kind of Hoylake. Very severe rains and some additional and mysterious causes made the course almost waterlogged for a while, with the result that it was heavy and slow and quite unlike its old hard, fast, almost fiery, self. The holes were longer, which, with the modern ball, may be an advantage, but some of the character and charm had gone. However, this is not, I imagine, likely to be a lasting state of things.

Those who know and love Hoylake talk of the holes not by numbers but by names. It is one of the few courses where this pleasant custom survives. There may not be anything intrinsically appropriate in the names, but they add a spice of romance. The Briars, The Alps, The Rushes, The Field, The Lake and The Dun and The Royal—these and others have always a stirring sound in my ears that mere dull numbers could never have. One of the first questions that people ask as a rule about a strange course relates to the short holes. There are four of them at Hoylake and of these I should say that one is very good in an ordinary way, a second very good in an unusual way, a third fair and a fourth poor. The good but comparatively ordinary one is the fourth—with a cop immediately in front of the tee, almost too close to it, and a big cross bunker and bank guarding the green, some trouble to the right and a hollow beyond. Nothing very much so far, you will say, but the hole is cunningly cut in the right hand corner, and there is nearly always a wind sweeping right across the green. The distance is about that of a cleek or long iron shot and it is a remarkably difficult thing to hold the ball up to just the right extent and no more. Hold it too much and you are apt to be short and in the bunker. Hold it too little and away you go with a hook and have a most difficult shot to come

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 back with. The next short one is the seventh, generally called The Dowie. It is an entirely original hole, and I think a wonderfully good one, though a champion once said to me that it was "the kind of hole you would find on Clapham Common." Again, the distance is about that of a cleek shot. The green is a small, triangular piece of turf under a lee of a cop, immediately to its left. In front of the green grows a patch of scrubby rushes, while along its right-hand edge runs a shallow little grassy depression—far too shallow to be called a ditch. It is quite easy to play wide and safe to the right and run the second shot over the depression, but the ball gets kicked away by that unobtrusive little trench and, though you may get a four that way, you seldom get a three. If, on the other hand, you go straight at the hole the least bit of hook will take you over the cup and out of bounds. The perfectly struck ball starts well out to the right, comes round with a draw, runs through the depression and stays close to the hole, but this does not often happen. The Dowie is an epitome of all Hoylake. Not much to look at, it is the devil to play.

The next short hole is the eleventh. It is called The Alps and its name is by far its greatest merit. It demands only a blind shot over a big sand hill and there is a certain amount of luck as to how the ball lands on the far side. It can be a very nasty shot in a big wind, but it is not at all a good hole. Once, in a championship, a man did it in one through the ball pitching full in the hole and staying there, and that is really the most interesting thing about it. The fourth and last short hole is the thirteenth, The Rushes. It needs a firm mashie pitch on to a flat green guarded in front by rushes and a cross bunker and everywhere else by pot bunkers. It is not an easy hole—it wants playing, but there is no thrill about it.

There are some fine two-shot holes. The first and last I have mentioned already. The first is a beauty. It is the apotheosis of the dog-leg hole, because after the tee shot one turns absolutely at right angles to his right, and with both shots there is that terrifying out of bounds waiting for a slice. There is no finer hole at which to see a really good player using the wind, first with a touch of slice perhaps, and then a little draw so as to get out of it all the advantage he can and just reach the green with his second. The only thing to be said against it (perhaps I am thinking of

that unfortunate record of mine) is that it is almost too good a hole to come at the very beginning. The sixth, or The Briars, which I also mentioned, is another admirable hole, especially against the wind, and there are several fine holes which I do not know whether to call two-shot holes or not. The fourteenth and fifteenth The Lake and The Field, are two in particular. With a helping breeze you may reach them; with a wind against you you certainly cannot; but whether you can or you cannot, they have a great quality which John Low once called their "indestructibility." They are always interesting and never easy.

The best score that has ever been made round Hoylake with card and pencil is 71, by the late Mr. Graham, and also by P. E. Taylor—who has now, I believe, gone to Canada as a professional. Something a good deal higher than that will do to get through most rounds of the amateur championships, if only for this reason that it nearly always blows at Hoylake. If it does blow, there is very little cover for the struggling golfer. He can creep along no friendly valleys, hide under the tee of no hills; he has just got to face it. Mr. Ball, after once playing a great round in a gale there, modestly explained that "he happened to be hitting the right kind of shot for the day—about ten feet from the ground." That is what we all often want to do at Hoylake, but in our case the shot does not "happen."

Taking it all round and trying to be impartial (for I love it dearly from many pleasant associations), I think it a fine, searching test of good golfing shots and a worthy match ground for international champions.