



## WBGC - how it started and how it changed

*This special Information Supplement of TTNB is prepared as a welcome to all new members and we hope it provides some useful background to the history and development of the club*

### It's an ill wind ...

While we offer the past members of Carswell GC every sympathy for the untimely closure of their course it is a great privilege for us at West Berks to receive an influx of new members.

We extend a warm welcome to everybody and can assure you that at West Berks we will do all we can to integrate our new members and golfing friends into the activities of our club.

TTNB is a regular newsletter produced to keep readers informed of results and events at WBGC and runs articles on the rules of golf, etiquette and other items of interest.

This is a special *Information Supplement* produced to welcome all new members to our club and give details of how golf was first played here and how WBGC was formed in 1978.

It also details some of the alterations implemented over the years and, in particular, the events that led to the planting of over 13,000 trees in 1990 that changed the course dramatically and helped to make it the interesting golfing challenge it presents today.

So how did it all start?

*The following article by Dave Ware first appeared in Tee Times in May 2015.*

### ... and in the beginning

In a recent issue of Tee Times I wrote that Fred Boobyer founded West Berks golf course. It was not long before I was reminded that, although Fred was indeed the founder of the club as we know it today, the course was, in fact, built by the Liddiard family.

By way of apology and out of interest I contacted John Liddiard to find out more. John kindly invited me to his home at Trindlewood House, just outside Great Shefford, to discuss the history of the course in more detail.

Trindlewood House is itself an impressive place and can be seen across the valley from the twelfth green but I was even more impressed when I was met in the car park by a real live peacock in full regalia.

It was a promising start to what was to prove a very interesting and enjoyable chat with John.

The Liddiard family has farmed the area since 1946 and in 1965 John's father, Bill Liddiard, bought 86 acres of land that had been requisitioned by the Air Ministry during the Second World War.

Back then there were air raid shelters and other buildings where our car parks and clubhouse are now situated and there was also woodland that ran from the eighth green up to the fifth tee.

This land was prepared for farming and put to growing wheat, a process that was complicated in that 620 oak trees had to be cleared. As John pointed out, with hindsight he would have left a few strategically placed oaks but there were no thoughts of a golf course then. However, John does remember a pond in the wood that is now the water hazard on the fifth hole.

It was John's sister Joan and her husband, Jimmy Crawford, who were keen golfers and members of Henley Golf Club, who put a plan to John and his brothers, David and Peter, and work started on the 130 acres between 1973 and 1974.

Joan and her husband, in consultation with an architect who had designed Chesterton Golf Club, designed the course and John and his brothers shared the construction duties. With a clubhouse formed from two prefabs bought and bolted together, the course opened for play in 1976.

John has many interesting anecdotes about the building of the course such as how during the drought of the summer of 1976 they used a bowser filled from the River Lambourn that runs through their farm in order to water the greens.

I also liked the idea that access to the back field was given by the Welford Park estate in exchange for a couple of life memberships.



Founder of WBGC Fred Boobyer

After operating for a year or so, the family decided to sell the course and in 1978 it was purchased by the well-known ex-PGA Tour player Fred Boobyer who formed the West Berks Golf Club.

John has been an honorary member ever since and was a great friend and playing partner of our first president and club stalwart, John Gregory, having been at school together at St Barts in Newbury.

He remembers with great delight the occasions when he carried his shotgun in his golf bag to provide real meaning and a touch of drama to a shotgun start.

Fred began an ambitious improvement programme that was continued by his daughter, Tina Clayton, and Les Witham who took over when Fred retired in 1989.

More details are contained overleaf.

**The booklet produced last year to commemorate the 40th year of WBGC is a very useful information source for anyone who wants to know more about WBGC.**

**Please collect a copy from the bar**

**Many thanks to the Hopwood Ash Financial Planning Consultancy for printing this bulletin**

Please send items that you would like to be considered for the bulletin to Dave Ware at: [ttnb.wbgc@gmail.com](mailto:ttnb.wbgc@gmail.com)

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## A path of continued improvement and talking trees with Laurie Birch

FRED'S AIM was always to create West Berks as a championship standard golf club and he was totally uncompromising in this aim.

With few trees on the course (more of this later) he compensated by growing the rough. At a committee meeting in the early 1980s, it was suggested that the rough was so deep and the carry so long on the sixth hole that it was beyond the means of the average golfer at West Berks at that time. Fred responded by quoting the carry to the inch and saying that if they cannot manage that distance then they know where they could get lessons.

Many improvements were made in Fred's time including building a new clubhouse and changes to course layout (we used to play what is now seventeen as the fifth and the present fifth was a very demanding eighteenth).

All these changes are detailed in the highly informative booklet prepared to commemorate our fortieth year.

When Fred retired in 1989, Bournebridge Golf Club, was taken over by his daughter, Tina Clayton and Les Witham. Improvements continued apace and following the appointment of Patrick Whelehan as head greenkeeper the following year a programme of work including improvements and redesign of the bunkers was undertaken that continues to this day.

Les and Tina also recognised that to make a real difference an ambitious programme of tree planting was required.

*This is covered in the following article that appeared in Tee Times in March 2012.*

### Talking trees with Laurie Birch

Laurie Birch was an enthusiastic member at West Berks from the mid-1980s and was a long-time supporter of our senior teams.

Unfortunately, Laurie died in 2014. but not before leaving a legacy that changed the face of the course.

A forester all his life and, at that time, chief forester at Eling Estates in Frilsham, Laurie used to tease the then owner, Fred Boobyer, by saying

repeatedly: "What this course needs Fred is a few trees."

Fred had planted a few hundred trees himself, notably the firs on the left of the fourth fairway, but not in the numbers that Laurie had in mind. It was only when Les and Tina took over in 1989 that Laurie's dream became a plan and it was soon apparent that when Laurie said a 'few trees' he meant 'a few thousand'.

The implementation of the plan was a joint effort. Many hours were spent with Les, Tina, Patrick and Laurie touring the course planning what trees were required and where they should be planted. Les and Tina knew how they wanted to improve the course and Laurie was on hand to give advice on the most suitable species to achieve the right balance of protection and arboreal splendour.

Apart from making the course more challenging, picturesque and interesting from a golfing point of view, there were a number of practical considerations to take into account.

One was to protect the thirteenth fairway from wind blowing across from the farmer's field that might carry damaging insecticides while there was also a need to those on the ninth tee from overambitious golfers playing the eighteenth desperate either to register their best ever score or anxious to partake in a consoling pint.

For these areas the fast growing leylandii were chosen and as for the rest it was very much down to Laurie to choose the trees that would give structure to the lines of the course and ensure all-year interest. Species chosen included English oak, red oak, sycamore, ash, hawthorn, beech, wild cherry, nothofagus, rowan, hazel, holly and (of course) birch.

Les and Tina applied for and received a grant from the Forestry Commission that



covered part of the cost and planting commenced in 1990.

Some thirteen to fourteen thousand trees were planted over an area of 9.9 hectares (just about 4 acres) by a contractor but all did not go strictly to plan. The position of Berkshire County Forestry Officer changed hands at a critical time and held up approval and delayed planting a month or so. This, together with an unnaturally dry spring, led to some 3,000 trees dying - all of which were replanted the following year.

There can be no doubt about the success of this project and when visitors to West Berks compliment us on the beauty of our trees it is difficult to remember just how bare the course was back before 1990.

There has been only one drawback from some players' perspective. As long-standing members will recall, the trees were planted with protective tubes in large plantations that were designated GUR and there were a couple of halcyon years when gale abandon from tee and fairway resulted in a free drop. Some have never recovered!

As a footnote it is worth mentioning that the necessity to cull trees that began shortly before he died was fully endorsed by Laurie. As he was keen to point out, fresh air and light are essential for the remaining trees to grow and thrive.