

Chapter 2

Lincoln Golf Club at Torksey

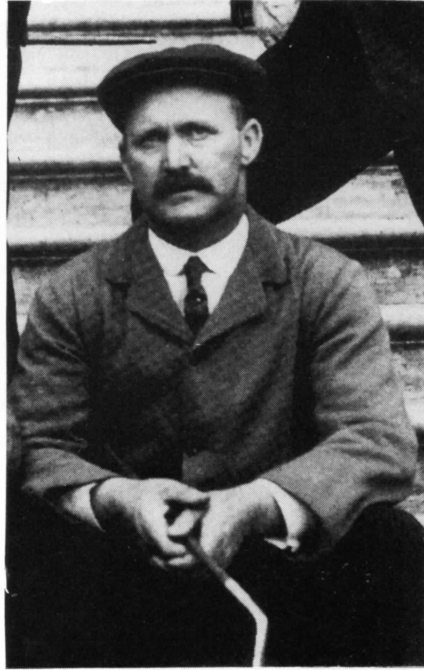
Following the decision to move the Club to Torksey, the sub-committee met immediately after the Special Meeting and agreed to invite Mr. J. H. Taylor of Richmond to meet them at the site of the new course. J. H. Taylor was one of the most famous golf professionals in the land at that time, having won the Open Championship in the years 1894, 1895 and 1900. He was also engaged in laying out many new courses throughout the country.

On 20th July 1903, J. H. Taylor came up to Torksey and inspected the ground. He met the committee to explain his initial ideas for the new course. A few days later his written report was received and is recorded on page 137 in the club's minute book No. 2. Unfortunately, no copy of the original layout has survived. The report included the following:

“The ground at Torksey I consider eminently adapted for the game consisting as it does of stretches of sandy warren and fields. In fact the club is to be congratulated on acquiring such a tract of land as it is this kind of ground that one usually identifies with the best of the seaside courses, which lends itself naturally to the making of a really good sporting course.

“The subsoil of pure sand of which the course is composed is productive of the very finest kind of turf that can be wished for, and will have a great advantage over grassland that is usually found on the majority of inland courses in that it will not require to be kept continually mown in order to keep it playable. It is my opinion that when the course becomes playable, it will practically keep itself. The nine holes that I laid out on my plan, I consider will prove to be a course of good length holes of a very sporting character, and

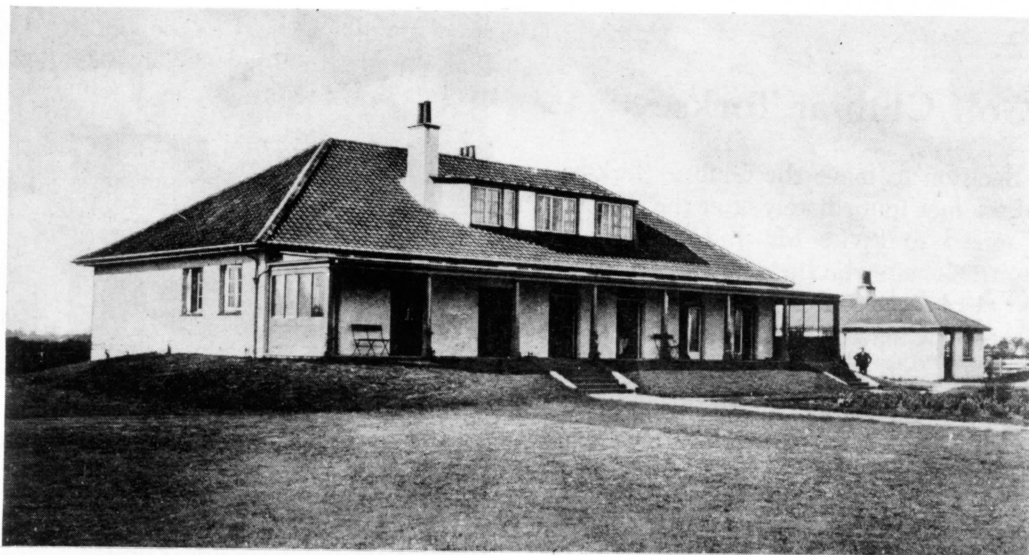
when the arable field in the centre is seeded down, I have no hesitation in saying that it will tax the skill of the finest players to play it well.”



J. H. Taylor

During September 1903, a meeting was held with the landlord's agent and the tenant farmer and arrangements were made to take over the land on 6th October. £5 was agreed to be paid to the farmer as compensation for the loss of the crop of turnips on the field.

Archie Earl, who two years later was to become the Club's first Professional, had been employed as groundsman on the West Common course. In October 1903, he was asked to go out to Torksey as quickly as possible to start to prepare the new course. The committee agreed to pay Archie £1 for his expenses following the move to Torksey, plus a bonus of £1 per month during the preparation period.



The Clubhouse 1904

The move to the new course helped to increase the flow of new members including many prominent figures from the surrounding area. The Earl of Yarborough was elected a member in October 1903. By December, the committee were able to invite tenders for the new clubhouse. Shortly afterwards Wm. Wright & Sons of Lincoln were instructed to start work on the new building at a price of £1,195. Excellent progress was also made on the course as, by January 1904, the committee were informed that several holes would shortly be open for play.

A full programme of competitions was arranged for the 1904 summer to mark the opening of the new course. A number of bogey competitions were organised: the ladies on Monday 13th June, mixed foursomes the next day, followed by a mens' event on Wednesday. On Thursday a mens foursome tournament match play took place and the week's festivities were concluded, on Saturday, with a professional match between Open Champions J. H. Taylor and James Braid. These were the two giants of the game at this time and a large crowd

of members and guests turned out to watch. J. H. Taylor was the winner with 74-75, James Braid finished 75-78.

Such was the enthusiasm for the new course that, by September 1904, the committee considered extending the course to 18 holes. Unfortunately the income at that time was insufficient and the scheme had to be deferred.

The fixture list for 1906 included spring, summer and autumn meetings, the now regular custom. Matches were arranged to be played against Belton Park, Elsham, Lindrick, Newark, Woodhall and Grimsby. The Secretary was also asked to fix a home and away match with Hollinwell. So the pattern of the golfing season was well established during these early days and has continued in a similar form up to the present time.

Problems always arise even in the best organised of clubs. Torksey is no exception, and many are recorded in the minute books. One such occurred in April 1906 when the Vicar of Torksey was concerned about the chastity of young girl caddies from the village. He wrote to the

committee asking them to limit the employment of these girls to those under 14 years of age. The Secretary was asked to investigate but no action appears to have been taken.

Archie Earl was officially appointed Club Professional in November 1905. He was to remain as professional until 1951 and became a well respected coach throughout the county. Archie was a quiet, gentle and most courteous man who was much loved and admired by members and visitors over these many years.

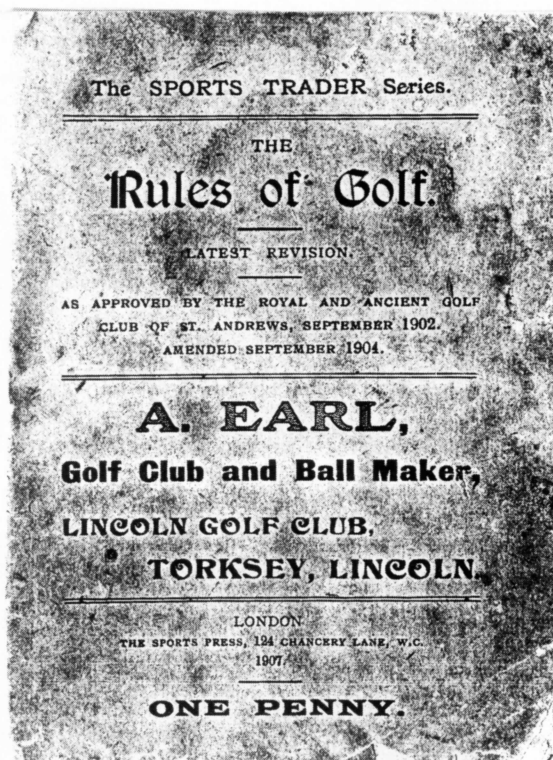


Archie Earl in 1950

In December 1906, the question of extending the course was again reviewed. The two great benefactors of the club Messrs. Shuttleworth and Sibthorp generously offered to contribute three quarters of the costs with the balance of £250 to be raised from members of the Club. This was agreed at a meeting in January 1907. By then the membership had grown to around 250.

During these early years, Lincoln Golf Club boasted several good players who were regular members of the County team. These included A. Wallace, W. J. Cannon, Revd. C. H. Lenton, P. Frankish, Revd. H. Ellison, H. T. Cannon, S. H. Lowe and Revd. Watney. The first County match was played against Nottinghamshire at Seacroft in 1904 which Lincolnshire won by 15 matches to 5. Lincoln Golf Club provided 8 players in that team.

Inter-club matches were being played regularly and Lincoln were County Team Champions in 1900, 1901, 1903 and 1906.



Extract from a Golfing Journal 1907

Amongst the many clerics who enjoyed their relaxation at Torksey was the vicar of Canwick, Revd. Watney. He was a fine player and one of the 'characters' of the club. He claimed to have hit a ball up into the oak tree to the right of the cross bunker on the 9th (then the 16th), and having reached the tree he shook it, and low and behold, 24 balls came down! Even then it was quite impossible to shake that tree which was of considerable girth. Another tale from the old days concerned a lady

member, Violet Peacock, who had great difficulty in driving over the bog in front of the 17th green (then the 13th). She desperately wanted to return a card for handicapping purposes, so decided to put the ball all the way from the tee across the causeway and up onto the green!

Minor problems also beset members in the clubhouse. Mr. Danby, who was one of the founding members, objected violently to being charged one penny for soda to go with his whisky. After numerous protestations the Steward insisted on continuing with the charge. However Mr. Danby got his own back by bringing with him on the train from Lincoln, a Gladstone bag containing his own soda syphon.

Following the generosity of Messrs. Shuttleworth and Sibthorp, negotiations were commenced to acquire more land so that the course could be enlarged to 18 holes. Two fields to the north of the clubhouse were leased from Frank Dickinson, and Archie Earl was asked to

rearrange the course to provide 18 holes. The accounts for 1908 showed an increase in rents from £73 to £120 which covered the additional land for the extension to the course. To help with the extra work required, a horse was purchased for £18. The work was finished during that year, and arrangements were made for a grand opening of the 18 hole course. This occurred on 12th May 1909 when three leading professionals Messrs. Duncan, Robson and Skoples together with Archie Earl played an exhibition match.

The great majority of members came to play golf by train because, in the early days of the twentieth century, motor cars were a very rare sight. A committee member from Retford found great difficulty in attending meetings as trains from Retford to Lincoln only stopped at Torksey very occasionally. The club Secretary was asked to write to the Great Central Railway Company asking them to arrange for the 11.30 train from Retford to stop at Torksey to set down golfers. This was agreed by the Company—such was the influence of golfers in those days.



12 May 1909—Opening of the 18 hole course



12 May 1909—1st Tee



Detail of above—William Warrener (far left) and Archie Earl (with club on right)

The Ladies section of the club continued to grow and in order for them to play on Saturdays, a resolution was put forward in 1910 that "Ladies be allowed to play on Saturday afternoons after 2pm." The ladies were disappointed to hear that the resolution had to be withdrawn following strong objections from committee members.

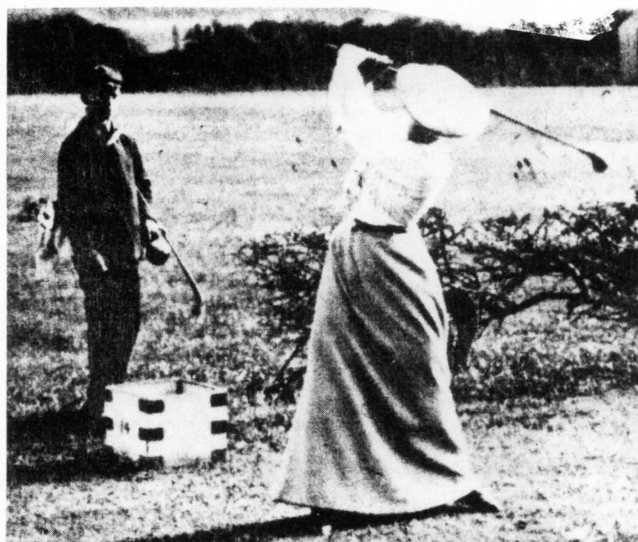
With the course extended to 18 holes and the steady flow of new members, the clubhouse was becoming cramped. Plans were drawn up for enlarging the building at an estimated cost of £800, a considerable sum at that time. Again Messrs. Shuttleworth and Waldo Sibthorp came to the rescue with offers of £500 and £100 respectively towards the cost on condition that "the balance be raised by members and that members' chauffeurs be allowed to play, while waiting, under proper guidance." This was approved and the extensions were completed. The facilities were thus improved to give more room for members and visitors. Visiting parties were rare at this time, but permission was given in September 1911 for the British Dental Association, Eastern Counties Branch, to hold a cup competition.

The earliest remaining annual report of the General Committee is for 1911. That season had been abnormally dry and had materially affected the course due to the nature of the turf and subsoil. In order to improve the course, John Hunter, a well known Scottish greenkeeper, was appointed. He had experience of St. Andrews, Lossiemouth and other noted courses. His efforts at Torksey were successful as a report in 1912 in a leading Golf Journal stated "it is a surprise to find an inland course having such a real seaside quality. Torksey is one of the six best inland courses in the country."

In August 1912, the rules of the Club were altered. It was agreed that the play of lady members should be under the direction of their own committee. This move was initiated in order to strengthen that section of the Club. That year, the total membership passed the 300 mark for the first time. Even with the new members,

funds were still desperately low. The income was barely sufficient for the efficient upkeep of the course and thus subscriptions would have to be raised to allow improvements to continue and for the building fund account debt to be reduced. Subscriptions were increased for men to £3 3s. and, for the ladies, £1 11s. 6d.

Following the formation of the ladies' committee, they elected as their Captain Miss E. C. Nevile, a member of one of the county's best known families. Elinor Nevile was one of the finest lady players in the country having twice reached the final of the English Ladies' Championship in 1898 and 1902. She represented England in international matches in 1903, '04, '05, '06, '08 and 1910. An article in *The Irish Golfer* of 1903 says "Her style is not a common one, but the results can not be quarrelled with. The peculiarity in Miss Nevile's style is that she stands so exceedingly upright, scarcely bending her body at all, and draws back the club very straight and rather slowly. Somehow or other she seems to have more power than the majority of players and is an exceptionally long driver."



Elinor Nevile on the 14th tee at Cromer in 1905

The list of the mens' Captains at this time contain many names that are still familiar to people living in the area. A. C. Newsum was Captain in 1906, J. S. Ruston in 1907, and C. H. Newsum followed F. C. Brogden in 1913. The Captain in 1914 and the subsequent years of the Great War was N. C. Cockburn. In April that year he sponsored an exhibition match between famous professionals Harry Vardon, Edward Ray and Robert Thompson together with Archie Earl. Great excitement occurred during the morning round as Ray tied the course record with a 71, with Vardon taking 72. In the afternoon match, Ray and Earl beat Vardon and Thompson 5 and 4.

Harry Vardon wrote a regular column entitled "Views on Golf" in the *Daily Mail*, and following his visit to Torksey, reported, "It was a splendid course on which four of us played at Lincoln last week. I was really surprised at its excellent quality. Its subsoil is pure sand, and it seems to be the only sandy region for miles around. It has some fine holes too; the long ones are good and two of the short ones stand out particularly in my memory. The ninth is crowded with bunkers which would appear to have been made by the wind blowing the sand little by little to other parts."



Harry
Vardon

On another occasion, Harry Vardon was playing an exhibition match at Torksey against Horne, a South African professional, reputed at the time to be the longest driver in the world. After a good lunch they appeared on the first tee and Horne's drive finished a little short of the 300 yard hole. "Can't you drive further than that?" asked Vardon, who then proceeded to put his ball on the green. Vardon continued outdriving Horne at hole after hole and completely put him off his game.

The first World War naturally reduced golfing activity to a very low level. All competitions and matches were suspended until further notice. A resolution was passed by the committee in January 1915 "that any member who has joined the colours and is absent from home, shall on his request be excused from subscription during the period of his absence." During these war years, the committee had great difficulty in maintaining the course to any sort of acceptable standard and members were urgently requested to help with the general running of the Club in any way that they could. Membership was falling fast and during 1916 fifty seven members resigned with only fourteen new members elected. Due to the serious financial position, help in the clubhouse was reduced and all catering ceased. Fires were banned in the smoking room and the ladies' room and no tablecloths were to be provided. The most stringent economies were put into effect.

The professional Archie Earl was asked to try to obtain munitions work in Lincoln because it was felt desirable that, even apart from economic reasons, all available manpower should be used in the service of the country. In order to increase income, the first six holes were rented out to S. Dickinson in April 1917 for sheep grazing at £20 per annum and the rest of the course to Jacob Denby at 10 shillings per acre. On 5 March 1918 a formal notice was received from the Lincolnshire War

Agricultural Committee instructing the Club to plough up seven acres of the course adjacent to the railway station (the current 15th and 16th holes).

So by Armistice Day in November 1918 the fortunes of the Club had by necessity fallen to a very low ebb. The total membership had sunk to some 200, of whom 28 men and 5 lady members remained with a free sub-

scription due to their war service. Income was not much more than 50% of the level at the beginning of the war. However, golfers have always been keen and determined people, and Torksey's remaining members were no exception. So during the winter of 1918/19, plans were prepared to ensure that the very high standards which were the hallmark of Lincoln Golf Club, could be restored at the earliest possible moment.