

Bletchingley Golf Club Celebrating 25 years



Co-ordinated by Roland Gribben

Prologue - The First Bletchingley Golf Club

Bletchingley's first golf club may have disappeared under the M25 but the developers of the second have ensured that the pioneer club has not been forgotten.

The prestigious Bletchingley Bowl, the first club's principal trophy, has taken its place among the top awards that have given the new club an extensive array of silver.

The first club, a nine hole course which opened in 1901 with an SSS of 68, was located between Bletchingley and Nutfield and is believed to have closed in 1947 (but there are no records to show whether it was operating after 1940). Early records show that leading course designer James Braid provided advice in 1909 to raise standards and the 1910 edition of Nisbet's Golf Year Book acknowledged that "the course was improved under Braid's advice."

The last winner of the Bletchingley Bowl was Dr K. Watson in 1939. His family gave it pride of place in their home until the new club filled the golfing gap. Liz Jackson presented the bowl to the club and it has been re-named the Jackson Rose Bowl in recognition of the family's association with part of Bletchingley's sporting history.

Available records show that during the 1920s and early 1930s there were 100 members. Visitors fees were 2s 6p a day and £1 a month. In 1935 membership had reached 165 but fell away to 110 after 1940 although visitor fees were unchanged at £1 a month.

The 'new' Bletchingley Golf Club

The timeline:-

- On 8th December 1992 Willowteam Golf PLC acquired the golf course.
- On 11th March 1993 the directors of Willowteam Golf PLC constituted the Club by the adoption of Rules.
- On 12th March 1993 Willowteam Golf PLC issued a prospectus containing the first offer of memberships.
- Construction of the course was completed in April 1993.
- On 15th September 1993 – Bletchingley Golf Club opened for play.

In 1991 local land owner Christopher Miles sought investment to develop a new course which was to be named St Mary's Golf Club.

Farming had provided the Miles family with a reasonably steady income but Christopher had doubts about whether the earnings stream could be maintained and decided a change in priorities and targets would improve long-term prospects.

The world of leisure and recreation passed the Miles test as an investment alternative and offered the opportunity to look beyond the responsibility to the family. Christopher cared deeply about Bletchingley and its residents and his neighbours and as a leader of the community had felt for some considerable time that he should include them in any future Miles family project.

Golf became the front runner after a review of investment options. Bletchingley was one of the few villages along the A25 without a course and Christopher felt the combination of course and village would produce closer links and benefit the village.

In his letter to potential investors (members) he wrote:

“I have been privileged to farm this land for over 40 years, and I am the fourth generation of my family to farm in the immediate area.

Changing times suggested several years ago that leisure rather than food production might be the demand of the future. After canvassing many opinions my family and I decided that there is an unsatisfied need for more exclusive golf than is provided in the district, and accordingly we have made available some 160 acres of land for the construction of St Mary’s Golf Club.”

The proposal was to offer ‘lifetime’ access to golf by the sale of up to a maximum 700 debentures/shares with the first 240 applicants having an opportunity of a financial return through Loan Notes.

His letter went on to say:

“While funding a golf course development through the issue of debentures may seem a novel Transatlantic or Far Eastern idea, I am reminded that in the 1920’s one local golf course was built through the issue of £100 bonds on land bought from my grandfather.”

And so it all began – Unfortunately for Christopher his early vision for exclusivity did not gain any traction. However, he took another look at the family investment options and found golf still to be the most appealing and potentially profitable. But indecision was eating into time. He took another look at the package and felt that the ‘exclusive’ tag was misplaced. Maybe something simpler would be more appropriate and provide a more meaningful local identity.

St Mary’s Golf Club remained just a vision; however the concept of Bletchingley Golf Club emerged as an appealing additional venue in a crowded golfing landscape. The original plan for a 160 acre course was replaced by a 138-144 acre lay-out that made the maximum use of a well-drained sandy loam site that would give the course ‘extra’ playing time.

Designer Paul Wright* eliminated considerable acreage of orchards to blend old and new wooded areas and enable Christopher to show his expertise in using landscape equipment to add ponds, shift earth and eliminate features considered too ‘friendly’.

The stream which runs through lower parts of the course was to provide the source of water for the 2 million gallon reservoir which the designers stated *“should provide vouchsafe irrigation supplies even in the driest of summers”* The summer of 2018 has put this to the most severest of tests!

* designed by Paul Wright and constructed by Whitnell Contracts Ltd. The Clubhouse was designed by Felce & Guy, Architects and constructed by Llewellyn Brighton Ltd.

The concept was ambitious and costly and the considerable investment needed meant Christopher had to bring in new partners and club members to share the cost. On paper and in conversation the golf transition was an appealing prospect.

Christopher acknowledged he had to move quickly to recruit members and underpin the finances of the club. He urgently needed a management company infrastructure and additional funding. He linked up with Willowteam Golf PLC in late 1992 and prepared for take-off.

Willowteam Golf PLC a golf management group with four experienced directors, John Boakes, Richard Hands, Andrew Richardson and Carl Daly, together with Christopher, completed the negotiations to buy Bletchingley Golf Course in December 1992. They rolled out a membership programme three months later and appointed Barreldfield Golf Network to handle the entire marketing programme. The spikey Colin Manktelow, a onetime England amateur international, moved in as Club Manager.

Bletchingley started life with the conventional mixture of loans and borrowings. Directors made an interest free loan of £537,000, Barclays chipped in with a medium term loan of £251,000 while more than 300 members 'provided deposits of £558,000.

Membership terms and incentives would provide a major marketing test for Bletchingley and also a challenge for nearby clubs anxious to avoid a loss of members. Christopher had been encouraged by the initial response from local golfers either with or without a club and others wanting to switch. There was an orderly queue when membership opened.

Membership sales opened on 17th March 1993 with the first to sign up at 9:30 a.m. that morning being joint members (no 1.), Stan and Valli Challener. They left the club many years ago, however, the records show that of the other 'Founder Members' who signed up in those early days member (no. 14) Chris Shortman is now our longest serving. There are 42 Founder Members who still remain attached to the Club today. See - Roll of Honour.

By opening day on 15th September 1993 Bletchingley had attracted 366 memberships including 58 joint making 424 members in total. Subscriptions had been widely pitched to reflect changing market conditions and included incentives to demonstrate that Bletchingley aimed to be competitive. There were four membership phases tailored to meet the market, experience the novelty of 'breaking in' a new course, and widen social life.

Bletchingley followed subscription convention of a two stage debenture and subscription set-up linked to a 'first come first served' basis and treated the 'down payment' as a deposit rather than debenture. The first membership phase involved a £1,000 deposit for a full member and £900 for a midweek player, rising in phase four to £2,500 for the full time category and £2,000 for the midweek group. Add an annual subscription of £650 plus VAT for full members and £475 before VAT for midweek players and Bletchingley could qualify for an 'exclusive' billing after all!

Initial reaction from management about membership was positive. Marketing director Carl Daly said in August 1993, a month before opening day the membership take up had been 'most encouraging'. First phase members were encouraging friends to join with the result that the bulk of the membership lived within a 25 minute drive from the course.

Mr Daly added: "Bletchingley will be a friendly and welcoming Golf Club and it is hoped that members will continue to introduce their friends and colleagues."

Behind the scenes management was filling vacancies on and off the course. For members the most important appointments were Club Captain and Ladies Captain. Willowteam decided to keep it in the family inviting husband and wife Malcolm and Evelyn Brodie to have the honour of being associated with a slice of golfing history. First appointments in any new club are important because they create the framework for building relationships with management, other clubs and effectively taking on a sales role.

See – Bletchingley Golf Club Captains

They were familiar with the local golfing population and quickly built up contacts further afield. An invitation to members to donate silverware meant Bletchingley started life well endowed. They included amongst many others the Founder Captain's Trophy, Brodie Cup, Butler Tray, Van Loock Vase, John Hall Cup, D'Agostino Cup, Ellen Dawson Trophy, Carr Coffee Pot and the Borer Anniversary Challenge Trophies.

Our current Bletchingley Golf Club opened its' fairways 25 years ago on **Wednesday 15th September 1993**. However due to the newness of the course and an extreme wet winter golfers were requested to 'tee up' on the fairway until the spring of 1994.

The management team were:

Club Manager	Colin Manktelow
Secretary	Nicky Davies (Robinson)
Club Professional	Paul Webster
Assistant Professional	Charles Ledger
Head Greenkeeper	Steve Savage
Catering Manager	Ron Whittaker
Bar Manager	James Maitland

The next 25 years would see many changes to this line up.

The opening day Stableford was much anticipated by the Founder Members – it was won by Ian Milton with 40 points.

Captains Drive In was Sunday 19th September 1993 followed by a “superb cold buffet for £10”.

A Texas Scramble was held on 26th September and two of the winning team are still members today and continuing to build up the silverware – Well done to Colin Crick and Veronica Borer. Colin featured again in October winning the 'Halloween Classic'.

The Senior's Section was founded in January 1994 and the first Seniors Captain was Derek Tustin.

Gary Langdon was the first men's Club Champion.

There was a buzz around the Club in those early days helped by an extensive social programme that added to Bletchingley's pulling power. Some competitions had up to 140 entrants! The monthly Medals and Stablefords were regularly oversubscribed.

The inter-club matches provided a test for the men. They won four of the first 11 matches and lost five. The ladies with only 26 members won three and lost four of their opening matches.

These were the halcyon days where the social life was almost as competitive as club games.

Malcolm Brodie has fond memories of the day when the club hosted the celebrity packed 'Jimmy Hill Classic' supporting SPARKS in the club's first year. A Viennese Evening was just one of the unusual additions to the social calendar. A marquee became a feature for the Summer Balls, underlining the squeeze on capacity and the need for expansion. The club's reputation for appealing Sunday lunches was established by Ron Whittaker, catering manager, priced at £5.75 for adults, £3 for under 12's and £1 for under 6's.

There was no shortage of the offbeat or the idiosyncratic. At one stage on Saturday mornings the Club Captain was entitled to receive a brandy delivered by the Club Manager when he started the back nine!

Malcolm has distinct memories of how fellow member John Woods was upstaged after displaying his traditional showmanship at the ninth hole in a match against the Ridge GC. As was usual for John, he took a flask of hot water, tea bags and milk and made fresh tea supplemented by homemade fruit cake. The Ridge captain and his partner were very impressed. In the return match as John and Malcolm walked to the tenth tee behind a grass mound they were staggered to find a long table complete with a free standing candelabra, tubular chairs from the clubhouse, piles of food, champagne, Strauss music playing and a waitress ready to serve. Malcolm said: "They were returning our hospitality. It was my most extraordinary and most enjoyable golfing experience."

Troubled waters ...

The owner and member relationship had developed smoothly in the early stages but come 1995 there were signs of unease as problems surfaced largely as a result of financial headaches. Willowteam Golf PLC had other golf investments apart from Bletchingley and faced criticism about their development of Hassocks Golf Club when there were grumbles at Bletchingley about a 5% increase in subscriptions. The rumour mill decided that Bletchingley subscriptions were subsidising Hassocks. John Boakes told the Bletchingley committee members there was no bail out for Hassocks financed by them but the reasons he gave for the subscription decision raised questions about the content of the Bletchingley development programme.

The subscription issue led to a change in relationships and understanding between Willowteam Golf PLC and members at a time when the golf boom was running out of steam. Willowteam privately acknowledged that planning needed to be sharper and more focused. Members had been promised a bigger and better clubhouse, a starters hut between the first and tenth tees (to be funded by members) and a driving bay on the practice area.

It all sounded positive enough but management had miscalculated one important element. The income from weekday green fees from society groups was well out of line with market rates - £18 or so at Bletchingley and £10-£12 at competitor courses. Hence forward planning and the financial profile were out of kilter. The directors and management had been encouraged by the early membership response to believe that Bletchingley could buck the trend. The market regarded this assumption as too optimistic and looking at Willowteam's overall financial position and outlook the management decided the best way to get out of the hole was to "*share the pain*" with the members. They went on to outline a strategy to attract "*larger and wealthier midweek societies*". This strategy included a substantial capital expenditure programme to improve the clubhouse facilities which would benefit the members and attract the essential midweek business.

As a result we saw plans to build a new function room and carry out improvements to the Pro Shop and changing facilities.

By this time Willowteam had introduced a 'special' new membership category where new joiners paid a joining fee rather than purchasing a deposit. This was followed by another new membership scheme on a subscription only basis and offered the incumbent members an optional scheme to surrender their deposit certificates for £5 in exchange for "*an absolute guarantee of a maximum subscription for the next 10 years plus a substantial discount funded from additional income generated from increased membership*". The exchange option was rejected and withdrawn; however, the new scheme went ahead with new members joining on this basis being charged a higher annual subscription than Deposit Holders.

Since the opening of the Club the original Professional had left and been replaced by John Coles. John subsequently left the Club at the end of 1996 and the Pro Shop was let as a concession to Charles Ledger, the return of our original Bletchingley assistant Professional and subsequent Senior Professional and Pro Shop concession holder at (wait for it!), Hassocks. Charles continued his activities at Hassocks and ran the Pro Shop at Bletchingley until 2002.

The drip, drip of unwelcome developments added to the unease among members despite management reassurances in a four page letter that the group was financially stable. However, the movement of professional staff between the two clubs did nothing to help the management case. What did help was the continuing growth in membership – up to 556 by March 1997.

In March 1997 Charles was joined by Alasdair Dyer, who became the resident PGA Professional. Alasdair had also worked previously at Hassocks and became a very popular member of the team (he played off a plus 2 handicap as an amateur).

It was also announced at the time that the planning officer had recommended planning consent for the promised Clubhouse alterations and extension, the erection of the starters hut and the driving bay on the practice area. The starters hut was erected (and paid for by the members) and credit to Granville and the Wiseville team that after 25 years we now have our fantastic covered driving range – it was worth the wait!

However, behind the scenes concern about the future had deepened. Bar talk combined rumour with the key question – can Willowteam (and that means Bletchingley) survive?

Both sides were struggling for answers without talking to each other. Members were conscious they would be accused of undermining the club and its future with anything that sounded damaging. It all sounded like the dialogue of the deaf.

The ear plugs began to move when a small group of members seized on a report about a similar situation at another club, Brampton Park in Cambridgeshire. The two sides at Brampton Park had differences about the future of their club and ended up settling them with the proprietary club selling out to the members. A similar initiative had also been successful at Clandon Regis. Could a deal be completed at Bletchingley?

The grey matter began to work and diplomacy replaced grumbling. The idea prompted the small group to make an informal approach to John Boakes and advise him if ever Willowteam Golf PLC came to a position where the sale of the Club became an option they would welcome the opportunity to discuss a potential offer. This was hardly dramatic but the dialogue had to start somewhere.

The offer did not quite represent a leap in the dark but the group were gambling that they would have significant support. Informal soundings had been taken to assess this support, leading the movers and shakers in the group to be reasonably confident that Bletchingley could become a members club.

The approach attracted interest and the ball began rolling. Over the next few month's there were many clandestine meetings where attempts were made to gauge the support of the members, make intelligent guesses about the fundraising possibilities and the monitoring of Willowteam's behaviour and tactics.

The group went 'public' in August 1998 outlining to others the possibility of Bletchingley becoming a members' owned club.

The member's group attempted to demonstrate more confidence and credibility by incorporating Bletchingley Golf Club Ltd as a potential purchase vehicle with Roger Byatt, Roger Borer and Robert Stevens as the initial directors, and Guy de Jonk as Company Secretary. They became involved in lengthy discussions where the full extent of Willowteam's problems was disclosed. It became clear that Willowteam was looking for, and had been anticipating, an approach from the members.

Following these discussions and much consultation with the members, and after taking advice from legal and financial advisors a full prospectus and 'letter of offer' was issued in March 1998 outlining a business plan to purchase the assets of Bletchingley Golf Club for £1.45 million to be financed by share capital of £300K and loan stock of £300K both to be subscribed by the members with the remainder from bank loans.

But hopes of a deal and a club run for and by its members were quickly dispelled. The members' buyout attempt failed to make the opportunity a reality. Members either took fright or were unwilling to dig into their pockets again.

Total commitments fell short of the £600K needed from the members. Further negotiations and a reduction in the sale price failed to bridge the gap, leaving the enthusiasts disappointed. For members who had made a substantial financial contribution with their deposits the proposal that they should make another contribution probably held little appeal.

But the buyout failure did not mean the end of the Bletchingley story. There were still more surprises in store during the hectic month of June 1998.

Willowteam Golf PLC announced that the directors and shareholders had 'unanimously decided to retain membership of Bletchingley Golf Club for the long term.' They also said the clubhouse improvements would be 'fast tracked to completion' by Christmas 1998.

Colin Manktelow left the business and Nicky Robinson was appointed as Manager.

A few months later there were announcements about the retirement of Willowteam directors, raising more questions about the future. Christopher Miles answered them. He told members in October he was back in charge. The family had taken over the shares and management and were back in the driving seat.

He had watched with increasing concern what he felt were unhealthy developments and with his family obligations in mind and those of the members he exercised provisions in the agreement with Willowteam to regain his inheritance.

The new Miles era

Some interesting years followed! The period between October 1998 and September 2002 was arguably the most intensive and strenuous period in Christopher's business life. Some friends felt it was the most depressing because of all the pressures and strain he was under but during those four years he impressed all who came in contact with him in the way he handled the crisis.

He faced a formidable challenge in attempting to find a new owner of a business attempting to establish an identity and provide the vehicle to give the family a stronger inheritance. As the fourth generation head of a family which at one stage held extensive land assets in Surrey and Kent heartlands he had the responsibility for giving the family a stronger asset base and the fifth generation the resources and prospects for improving returns.

There was enthusiasm among the membership and other investors until Bletchingley started to suffer from the unhealthy combination of a drop in confidence as financial pressures on and off the course took their toll. The future suddenly looked bleak as the cost of operations and investment when measured against income headed in the wrong direction.

Golf rescue acts traditionally follow a familiar route with bank loans and contributions from directors providing one source and members in a corporate set-up attempting a members' buy out another. Both routes had been unsuccessfully tried at Bletchingley, raising bigger question marks hanging over the club's future.

Christopher had watched and monitored the previous deterioration and had quickly come to the conclusion that he was the last resort. He had stepped into the breach at the end of October 1998 much to the relief of members but with another set of awkward questions hanging in the air, notably the impact on the family fortune, his responsibilities and above all whether he could tap another source of rescue finance.

He worked tirelessly and tried to get members to consider an alternative to the buyout they had failed to support earlier in the crisis build up. Yet at the same time he was lending a hand in course improvement work to fulfil promises made earlier. Greenkeepers have vivid memories of Christopher behind the wheel of a large digger attempting to extend the 12th tee. Waste material thought to be black alluvial organic soil was spread over fairways in an effort to improve them. Christopher as crane driver quickly moved into action only to find broken pipes, waste pipes and other rubbish filling the digger – the clear up exercise was an interesting consequence!

Sadly, it all came to an end in 2002. Deterioration in Christopher's health worried the family. The financial burden was proving almost impossible to handle. Christopher agonised over his responsibilities to both his family and the members so he advised the Club Committee that he intended to retire and offer the course and clubhouse to the members to set up their own Private Members Club either by buying the freehold or taking on a lease. The final option was selling to a new owner. Members looked at the lease option but quickly found it presented too many problems. They also went down the borrowing route only to find it would be a waste of time.

A figure of around £2M was hanging over the freehold package when Christopher put his clubs to rest. The dream had almost become a nightmare. He held his own inquest, privately listed the mistakes that had been made from the weaknesses in the investment partnership to a changing market.

The transition

Willowteam placed the club for sale on the open market and the clubhouse was awash with rumours of potential bidders.

Roger Borer, the Club's Hon Secretary at the time, received a phone call early one morning from a gentleman named Granville Wise who said he was interested in buying the club – they arranged to meet on the coming Saturday morning with Granville's son Steve for a round of golf – Granville was impressed with what he saw and heard and decided by the time they had reached the 15th hole that he would like to make an offer.

On 28th August 2002 Willowteam Golf PLC went into 'Administrative Receivership'.

Granville made a sealed bid against local sporting investor the late Ron Noades, owner of what became the Altonwood Group of golf clubs; Surrey National and Westerham, and subsequently Woldingham, The Addington and Godstone.

Granville won the day and the administrative receiver sold the business to Wiseville & Co Ltd on 6th September 2002 for £1.86M.

Willowteam Golf PLC was liquidated and by 8th July 2005 deposit holders had received a total of 4.1p in the £ for their original 'investment'.

A new era dawned with Granville Wise at the helm

The Wiseville years

Granville Harold Wise the entrepreneur, son of a miner, born and raised in the South Wales valleys becomes the third owner of Bletchingley Golf Club.

He paid just under £2M for the business and has had few regrets about a decision that provided relief for Christopher.

[Christopher passed away in November 2015 aged 87]

A golfing venture is hardly the type of investment that appears in the portfolio of the ambitious entrepreneur but then Granville doesn't fit easily into the conventional investment pattern because he is passionate about sport. Welsh rugby blood of the Scarlets variety runs deep in the Wise make-up. He grew up watching Llanelli and has gone a stage further with the transition of the Scarlets by putting his money where his heart is. He provided a helping hand for Llanelli to make the transition to professional status and has continued to see them through difficult periods. Rugby is a love affair for Granville and golf is his indulgence as a mixture of business and social investment in a sector that provides misleading profit indicators and needs considerable care and attention.

The success of his non-sporting portfolio has given Granville the time and scope to widen his horizons. He left school with the odds stacked against him. His father insisted he became a miner. He spent eighteen months in the coal mines from the age of 16 and then National Service with the RAF before he embarked on a business career that brought him to London. As a one time employee of Nestlé he then became a director and subsequent owner of Winterbotham Darby the award-winning supplier of high quality foods to the retail and foodservice sector. Subsequent investment has seen him involved in property development and ownership as well as the social care homes sector.

Granville has spent most of the last 16 years wrestling with the peculiar economics of golf, providing extra funding, investment and covering losses to avoid the village losing its second golf club. The first was a WW2 casualty. The second celebrated its Silver Jubilee this September.

Granville has provided the stability and funds needed to avoid Bletchingley history repeating itself. Doubts have been raised from time to time about the long-term commitment of a successful entrepreneur who does not regard profit as a dirty word. Profit still eludes him and more investment is needed but he insists – “I’ve no intention of selling.”

He makes it clear that this commitment is personal and limited to his lifetime, a recognition that he does not want to saddle the family with a volatile investment. Decisions further down the line will be in the hands of his grandson, Steven Green, chief executive of Wiseville.

Granville said: “When I took over in 2002 I had the aspiration that Bletchingley would make money. Not a lot. But it’s been disappointing as far as the profitability of Wiseville or Bletchingley Golf Club is concerned, we’ve lost money most years and I’ve had to dig into my pocket to keep the finances going but having said that I’ve no intention of selling it.

Members have heard similar declarations from the previous owners but Granville has now been in the owners’ box for 16 years and long ago recognised he was in the golf support business. He aimed at seeing an early profit but found the sport’s financial appetite has kept red ink on the balance sheet for some time.

The initial tasks at Bletchingley were to steady the ship, get the course back on track with an investment in new green keeping machinery, improve the club house facilities and increase membership numbers. An investment of just under £1M saw significant changes to the Club House; a major refurbishment included new changing facilities, the spike bar and sun room with balconies over, a new office, reception area, enlarged corridor and major refurbishment of the bar, function room and Pro Shop.

Granville wanted to expand his golfing enterprise and made serious bids for both the Woldingham and Wildwood, both of which were ‘taken to the wire’ but were unfortunately unsuccessful due to a hostile alternative bid in the case of the Woldingham and withdrawal from the market of Wildwood. At a later date a further bid was made for The Addington which was subsequently purchased by the Altonwood Group.

Granville looks back at his time with the club. He says: “I’ve enjoyed it, I enjoy the people here. We’ve got some very good members. The senior people are great to have around. I enjoy coming down here. It’s a hobby more than a business. I have other businesses that thankfully make money. I paid just short of £2m for the club and spent £250,000 in the first year on machinery, planting of new trees and other improvements so it was quite a big initial outlay and it’s been disappointing to see the membership drift down. It’s down 15pc over the last five years. However, we’ve embarked on a progressive investment programme, improving everything and including keeping the clubhouse up to scratch.”

“I played my first game of golf at St Ives with my kids but didn’t play again till I was in my 50s then had heart attack but played squash and other sports. I was 55 when I started playing golf regularly. Never been great shakes with best handicap of 17-18”.

Prior to Bletchingley Granville was a member at Lingfield Park Golf Club.

The two distinct phases in Bletchingley's history and development mask different styles and management. Willowteam had the difficult initial task in putting the club on the golfing map, and Wiseville now have the equally difficult task of consolidation and growth to contend with.

The Club still has 42 founder members. Many of them have made important contributions down the years. The need for a relationship that combines membership with pleasure and achievement is another of golf's elusive qualities. But there is a niggle factor which is ripe in the sport and easily nurtured. Granville has attempted to counter the negative elements with a successful 'chat approach', talking, circulating and debating major and minor issues with the members.

Bletchingley still has a heavy investment bill to meet and Granville is looking to the management and members to work together to achieve mutual successes going forward. Club leaders have drawn on the expertise and management ability in the membership ranks over the years and this membership contribution has been an important element. An active social life combined with a growing competition and match programme has had an important role in improving Bletchingley's appeal and quality.

The framework is sound. The Men's and Ladies Sections are very active with regular competitions, social events and charity fund raising. The Seniors' section has become the biggest in the club through a combination of age and action. The entry age has been reduced to 55 and made the veteran tag irrelevant despite the growing batch of 55-90 year olds demonstrating that they still have the stamina to accommodate Bletchingley's 18 holes.

There has been no lack of enterprise in taking advantage of the freedom to form society type groups which widen appeal and add variety. The BOFs, the biggest of them, is the polite name for the Bletchingley over 50s. The El Comancheros provide cover for the 'bandits' and the EGGs, Elderly Gentlemen's Golf Society, enjoy visits to courses both at home and abroad. A youth section made an encouraging start but now needs fresh enthusiasm for a revival. For now the future seems secure. Granville is adamant the club will stay in the family.

Greenkeepers

The core business of a 'proprietary' golf club is the golf course looked after by the 'invisible' pairing of Paul Howard, Head Green Keeper and Colin (Biff) Morgan and their support team. Both Paul and Biff have been at Bletchingley since the beginning and have spent most of the time nurturing the end product.

The course still has clumps of apple trees that provide a seasonal taster. The flowers have retained their summer appeal and continue to deliver surprises and the fairways and greens look friendly until they are tested. 10,000 new trees have been planted blending with the existing to provide a new pattern and breaks between holes which look natural rather than artificial.

The scale of planting has provoked debate but greenkeepers Paul and Biff insist the figure is in the right ballpark. They should know because they were closely involved in helping Christopher Miles, convey much of his inheritance into the course. (And indeed, many more were planted in the early Wiseville ownership).

They recall with a smile how the enthusiastic Christopher appeared to take great delight in digging out ponds, moving water, rock and earth to create a course that has matured rapidly down the years and earned its place among the leading Surrey clubs. Both Paul and Biff have played a key part in maintaining the pace of improvement.

The course has matured over 25 years but it has not been easy.

Paul's biggest frustration remains divots. 'Most of our members replace them. Visitors and societies don't.'

Another long term member of staff ...

Every golf club has a Marilyn, the lady responsible for trying to keep the members happy but finds it's 'mission impossible'. Bletchingley has a different Marilyn. For 23 years Marilyn Holmes has exercised authority in the noisiest and some would say the most important part of the club without causing any upset and remains a most popular member of staff.

Her territory ranges from the kitchen to the dining room and bar but the busy lady has no official title. She doesn't need one. A flick of the eyebrows, a sigh or 'one liner' is enough to keep the peace and the offender eat humble pie. There are the club rules and there are Marilyn's. She's seen the head of catering change eight times and is now helping the ninth settle in and avoid the problems that others experienced. She joined the Bletchingley team from a clerical job and quickly made herself at home. "There are some wonderful people here and most of the time it's been very enjoyable. Over the last few years it's been particularly nice to see children and grandchildren coming along. It makes you think you're part of a family." And guess who has the role of mum?

Marilyn has served more than 50,000 meals and snacks down the years according to some members who claim to have eaten a lot of them. She has one taboo subject in her daily conversations. Yes it's golf because she says with a twinkle in her eye because "it's boring." Marilyn will, under pressure, admit she has been on a course once – as a caddy. She plans to retire in four years' time so any member wanting to persuade Marilyn to break her duck had better start offering lessons now.

And long term Member Chris Shortman ...

It has been a long wait but for Chris Shortman the silver jubilee is a double cause for celebration. He is technically the club's longest serving member and appropriately for his status as a club committee member his game is improving.

He credits the new practice setup and lessons for the greater satisfaction from his course excursions. He says: "I'm getting an extra 20 or more yards on the range now. It's the best change there's been. I wish it had happened earlier."

Chris was in 14th place in the original list of 424 members, registering just ahead of the first captains Malcolm and Evelyn Brodie on March 17, 1993.

He found the club suited his temperament although acknowledges he spent too much time caught in the 28 handicap trap. He dropped to 14 in one purple patch, is now at 20 and aiming for 18 with the help of more practice time. Bletchingley grew on him as his circle of friends widened and he found himself enjoying club matches and competition events. He likes the atmosphere and what sounds like a golf democracy; He says "It has always been a friendly club and one where there is equality."

The financial crisis of 2001 was a testing time all round. Chris, a banker with HSBC could see the problems looming. "We had 13 weeks of rain. A lot of people left and as a result Christopher had to go for receivership." 16 years on and change of ownership his love affair with the one time orchard continues. He says: "It is still a fantastic course in terms of beauty and layout."

His affection for the course increased further when he staged a charity golf day and raised £5,000 for good causes. His contribution down the years has put him among the club's establishment as a member of the Club committee. He did achieve one ambition before his new found form arrived. He won the prestigious Millennium Cup in 2012.

Now he is facing a fresh challenge. His wife Sara is making up for lost time and has seen her handicap tumble six strokes to 30.

Reflections of John Palmer (Senior's Captain 1999)

Before 1993 the opportunity to join a golf club was severely restricted. To join you had to have a handicap but you could not get a handicap unless you belonged to golf club, similar to obtaining an Equity Card!

Happy Valley (now Surrey National GC) and Bletchingley opened in the same year and I joined both. Happy Valley had a 'Nissan Hut' for the changing rooms but the proprietor had ideas about a championship course and to make it more difficult he contoured the rough into many fairways, making it impossible for fee paying and members alike. This practice was soon abandoned when the fee paying members drifted away because of the difficulty and loss of many balls.

Bletchingley was very sandy and had free drainage but the 16th fairway had very little grass retained for some years. The tree planting between the fairways was well thought out and has matured well over the years.

In addition wild roses have been used extensively and fruit trees retained much to the delight of the players although neglect has stunted their fruit production. Now after 25 years the course has matured and the views from the 7th, 14th and 16th are wonderful which lifts your spirits when you are not performing well.

To keep on top of the course condition is a mammoth task which the green staff cope with extremely well despite the weather and the dreadful pressure on the greens.

The senior section was formed at the specific request of Christopher Miles. The first captain was Derek Tustin who tragically died early.

The committee consisted of Captain, Vice-captain, Competition Secretary and Treasurer plus three general committee members who signed up for three years. The section was set up on business lines with great thought being given to the competition formats and inter-club matches.

Tee times were critical. No tee offs were allowed before 8am to enable the ground staff to swish the greens and do other jobs. The organisation proved to be very popular and numbers increased dramatically.

When I was captain in 1999 a committee decision was made to close the membership because there were insufficient tee times allowed. The situation was soon resolved because the directors realised the seniors was an attractive section for membership. By May 2006 the membership was 94 of which 29 are still members today.

The first manager was a gentleman called Colin Manktelow who had a handicap of one. I understand he was allowed an entertainment allowance which never showed the light of day among members. After his departure, Nicky Robinson was appointed manager. She proved to be extremely popular. The popularity of the seniors was due to the professional approach by the committee and the certainty of the correct decisions made.

The section has always been very popular. All new golfers are welcomed and encouraged not only to enter for the inter-club matches but also for all the events arranged. The members have also arranged trips away during the year which has helped cement relationships despite the horrors of shared accommodation in hotels. On several occasions players have slept in their cars to get peace and quiet to escape the snoring from their partners!

The principal popularity of a club is made by the members. The Bletchingley seniors' section has never been short of entertaining characters. Here are some of them.

Ian Wylie - Knowledgeable about all your ailments even though you were unaware you were vulnerable.

Ron Shepherd - Even when he was stricken with illness he won the away day golf trophy.

Eric Shepherd - Said he'd won the lottery but never found the lottery ticket. Originator of the most appalling jokes which made you cringe - Thank goodness for partial deafness!

Alan Rook - Very strong golfer whose tee shots would be distributed in many parts of the fairway but rarely on the course.

Ted Van Loock - Captain not only of club and seniors but also captain of Redhill and Reigate club. Presented trophies he'd found in charity shops including one awarded to the seniors inscribed Bletchingley Rifle Club. Also organiser of many wonderful trips abroad.

Peter Hyciuk - Teed off 14th par 3 with putter.

Peter Kerrell - Away day Singing Hills - on 18th green trolley plunged into water closely followed by the captain who continued on next nine holes soaked up to knees.

Bryan Morse - Nearly 90 and still playing 18 holes

John Shepherd - Provides trophies for Elderly Gentlemen's Golf Society trips abroad.

Nigel Springthorpe - Repeating awful jokes

John Trimmer and *John Cooper* - Sponsored the Two Johns trophy

Ian Urquhart - Originator of the most appalling jokes

Bill Pressey - Mail on Sunday executive who brought sensible conversation to the club. We lost him too early.

My best memory - In my early days on a Tuesday match day I drove the par 5, 15th in 3 (playing off 28). I was so pleased I saw Colin Manktelow and joked that perhaps I could be rewarded with a hole in one. I can't repeat the rude remark he made....

Juniors

The next generation have been a priority over the years. Support from members has been a feature of club activities and programmes tailored to the Junior Section have played a valuable part in encouraging the Bletchingley youngsters to spend time testing their ability.

Numbers have ebbed and flowed over the last 25 years, reflecting the competition played by the electronic world and its attractions but at its peak the section had some 40 members who were keen to play against other clubs and in County competitions beside their own internal games.

The role of the Junior Organiser was crucial with Derek Jones, John Donelan and many willing supporters contributing a significant amount of time and effort over the years.

The start of the Millennium was the most successful period with Matt Chapman playing off scratch and moving on to Wentworth, Rob Ditch (Junior Captain) winning the Surrey Junior Boys Knockout and reducing his 10 handicap to 4., Rachel Williams reduced her handicap to 5 playing initially with us before moving to Walton Heath through Epsom College where she captained Surrey Girls and also played for Cardiff University. We must not forget Michael Day who started with us as a shy young man but has now achieved professional status and is now part of the Bletchingley team.

It would be nice to see the revival of the Junior Section as we move forward into the next 25 years.

Message from the President

The Club's first Honorary President was Steve Coppel, Manchester United footballer and multi-team football manager, including Crystal Palace who held their Centenary Golf Day at Bletchingley.

Steve was succeeded by the Club's current Honorary President, newscaster and local celebrity Nicholas Owen, who takes an active part in Club events particularly in supporting the Captains' Charities.

Nicholas has sent a message to Granville congratulating him on spelling out the future of the club. It reads: "I think all members should feel grateful to Granville for sticking with Bletchingley Golf Club to make it in my view the friendliest club of the many I know."

Silver Jubilee Celebrations

Against this background the jubilee events celebrated throughout the year have assumed much more than the conventional celebratory drink or presentation of a new piece of silverware. They encompassed commitment, dedication, progress, change, sacrifice and survival as well as frustration, blunders and disappointment over the 25 years.

Members and their guests, together with some of the Wiseville team, celebrated the opening day of the Club at the gala Dinner Dance attended by 152 on 15th September 2018, exactly 25 years to the day. A sumptuous meal was followed by historical, current and future looking speeches before the live music struck up and the dancing commenced. An enjoyable time was had by all!

Granville shared centre stage with some of the 42 remaining Founder members who have a unique role in club history. They are among those who have contributed much to ensuring Bletchingley finally made it to the tee on time.

There is much to celebrate in a club where uncertainty clouded the outlook for long periods despite the considerable efforts to give the fledgling club a sound start.

The club boasts all the benefits associated with the second generation of courses that have changed the traditional image of a sport discouraging rather than encouraging expansion and displaying all the characteristics of the closed shop.

During the year the longer serving members have reminisced, recalling such times as when the club secretary had the important duty of standing on the 10th tee on a Saturday morning and handing the club captain a tincture as he started the back nine or was that just wishful thinking?

A view from the General Manager

I have now been a member of the team at Bletchingley Golf Club for just over 10 years and in that time I have witnessed many changes. The course has matured greatly with the trees that were once little saplings now a major obstruction if your ball finishes behind one. Newly positioned bunkers and the refurbishment of certain tees has contributed to the new look since the course opened.

Employees of Bletchingley Golf Club have come and gone but I believe the current team is the most cohesive, friendly group we have had in my 10 years at the club and a pleasure to work with.

The current issues we face in golf in 2018 are far different to when the club opened 25 years ago. Joining as a member was standard for any golfer playing the game back in 1993. Today our world is far different with economic uncertainty and people preferring the flexibility of playing different courses as and when they choose. Many golf clubs including the more exclusive venues are now opening their doors to the nomad golfer and the competitive nature of the business means it has become extremely difficult and is no longer a profit-making certainty.

The management, staff and membership are all striving for the same goal which is to secure the long term future of this fantastic club and to make the next 25 years as memorable as the last.

Final thoughts

The first 25 years in the life of Bletchingley Golf Club could not have been more challenging.

A strong membership base and management were tested by changes in ownership, a competitive environment and cost pressures relieved by a social agenda that earned the club a friendly reputation.

There will be new pressures over the next 25 years for a sport attempting to adjust to an environment where housing demand will be an attractive alternative for the corporate investor and another challenge for members. January brings overdue rule changes and endless debate about their value.

The drive to maintain members and attract a new generation has become more intense, particularly in Surrey. A sobering thought to finish is one of the statistics that perplexed the Bletchingley pioneers - the estimate that within a 15 mile radius there are 75 clubs competing for business!



If you've enjoyed this short history how about making a contribution to one of the Captain's Charities – see your Captain or make a donation in one of the collection boxes located on the bar.

Ladies:	ESDAS (East Surrey Domestic Abuse Service)
Men:	Beefy's Charity Foundation
Seniors:	Great Ormond Street Hospital Charity (2018)
	Children's Trust Tadworth (2019)

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Disclaimer:

The Co-ordinator and contributors to '*Bletchingley Golf Club – the first 25 years*' have provided their input in good faith. Any errors or omissions can be put down to loss of memory or a little bit of creative imagination!

Founder Members – Roll of Honour

<u>MEMBER NO</u>	<u>NAME</u>	<u>DATE JOINED</u>
14	CHRIS SHORTMAN	17.03.93
28	ROBIN ANDERSON	17.03.93
36	MALCOLM & EVELYN BRODIE	17.03.93
71	ALAN CRANSTON	20.03.93
82	JENNY HOWARTH	21.03.93
85	BRYAN MORSE	22.03.93
92	BRIAN & MAVIS HAEGER	22.03.93
95	ALAN ROOK	22.03.93
96	PETER KERRELL	22.03.93
136	TONY & PAM WOOLFORD	31.03.93
167	MICK LYONS	09.04.93
173	JOHN KEEN	08.04.93
178	GEOFF MOORE	15.04.93
179	PETER GRAY	14.04.93
189	PETER TOWNSEND	15.04.93
218	JOHN PALMER	30.04.93
220	BARRY GALE	01.05.93
221	PETER & WENDY SMITH	01.05.93
228	FIONA MCNICOL	02.05.93
232	JOHN MORRIS	03.05.93
237	TONY CLARKE	05.05.93
240	PHIL HUNTSMAN	06.05.93
244	IAN & ANNEGRET DUERDEN	06.05.93
264	DAVID ALLARD	14.05.93
289	ROGER & VERONICA BORER	07.06.93
294	COLIN CRICK	09.06.93
301	DOUG LAWRENCE	12.06.93
305	TED VAN LOOCK	15.06.93
323	JEAN PRICE	05.07.93
328	PHIL & EL RHODES	07.07.93
338	KEITH & LINDA MASCARENAS	21.07.93
356	JEAN HIGGINS	12.08.93
360	PETER & JUDITH ROSS	25.08.93

Captains

Year	Club/Men	Ladies	Seniors
1993/94	Malcolm Brodie (c)	Evelyn Brodie	Derek Tustin
1994/95	Tony Butler (c)	Pat Mitchell	Ted Van Loock
1995/96	Ted Van Loock (c)	Joan Carr	Guthrie Caven
1996/97	Roger Borer (c)	Sheila Clarke	Brian Haeger
1997/98	Andy Kirby(c)	Sally Hopkinson	Peter Kerrell
1998/99	Don Seller (c)	Jean Higgins	John Palmer
1999/00	Geoff Parrish (c)	Mavis Haeger	Tony Price
2000/01	Alan Cranston (c)	El Rhodes	Wally Coleman
2001/02	David Turner (c)	Annegret Duerden	Derek Jones
2002/03	Nigel Springthorpe (c)	Sandra Wright	Peter Townsend
2003/04	John Keen (c)	Rosie Shelley	Roy Berry
2004/05	Peter Mattinson (c)	Zoe George	Chris Butler
2005/06	David Wilson (c)	Veronica Borer	Guy de Jonk
2006/07	Richard Lee (c)	Beryl Tatnell	Bruce Turner
2007/08	Wally Coleman (c)	Sylvia Berry	Peter L Smith
2008/09	Bruce Turner (c)	Debbie Rose	Peter Kerrell
2009/10	John Keen (c)	Linda Dunwoodie	Bernard Waterworth
2010/11	Tony Woolford (c)	Ros Shepherd	Tony Clarke
2011/12	Andrew Rumble	Marilyn Luson	Alan Herring
2012/13	Wally Coleman	Judith Ross	Jim Millmore
2013/14	Bruce Turner	Jenny Manser	Tim Mumby
2014/15	Peter Ross	Rosemary miller	John Donelan
2015/16	John Blackley	Geraldine Edwards	Mark Chabrel
2016/17	Mark Fuller	Pauline Bourne	Andrew Rankin
2017/18	David Allard	Viv Harrison	Roger Borer

(c) = Club Captain

Managers

Colin Manktelow
 Nicky Robinson
 Roger Borer
 Matthew Hazelden
 Steve Cookson

Professionals

Paul Webster
 John Coles
 Charles Ledger
 Alastair Dyer
 Neil Plimmer
 Karl Wesson
 Steve Cookson

Course Record

Men – Darren Bragg Gross 67

Ladies – Veronica Borer Gross 75

Names of the Holes

1 st	Quarry Hangers
2 nd	Leatherncombe
3 rd	Pluto
4 th	Pine Trees
5 th	Castell Caerffili
6 th	Cedar of Lebanon
7 th	O'Rourke's
8 th	Badger Sets
9 th	Workhouse Lane
10 th	Hexagon
11 th	Hop Garden
12 th	Tiger
13 th	Willow
14 th	Wytch Iron
15 th	Cobra
16 th	Over the Hill
17 th	The Brad
18 th	Church View