



SHIRLEY PARK

GOLF CLUB

CROYDON, SURREY

Boasting a historic parkland course and a charming clubhouse, Shirley Park Golf Club is a golfing haven in a quiet, suburban oasis

Although located just a mile from East Croydon train station, and a few yards from the busy A232, once you walk through the double doors at the entrance to the clubhouse at Shirley Park Golf Club, a sense of peace and serenity pervades, and all the stresses of the outside world seem to instantly ebb away.

Protected by mature trees on all sides, the 130-acre site offer an oasis of green tranquility set amid one of south London's most populated areas, and it's easy to see why this most popular of clubs has proved such an attractive haven for suburban Surrey golfers over the last century or so.

Wind back the clock to 1913, and you would find legendary golf course architects Tom Simpson and Herbert Fowler – whose other courses include Walton Heath, The Berkshire and, most famously, Pebble Beach – putting the finishing touches to Shirley Park's magnificent 18-hole parkland layout.

The course was officially opened by the Lord Mayor of London, Sir Thomas Vansittart Bowater, in July 1914. It was a star-studded affair, with two former Open champions, J H Taylor and Sandy Herd, taking part in a match, which Taylor won by four shots after nipping round in a tidy 73. An invitation to London's then current mayor to tee off the centenary celebrations in 2014 sadly went unanswered, denying members the opportunity of seeing Boris Johnson most likely shank his tee shot through the pro shop window.

With the First World War breaking out just two weeks after Sir Thomas's opening tee shot, club life at Shirley Park, not surprisingly, got off to a stuttering start – but it soon returned to something resembling normality following the cessation of hostilities in 1918, and the club has been gently moving with the times ever since. With current membership numbers hovering around 450, the club is buoyant and has recently enjoyed a significant influx of new members attracted by the superb course conditions, welcoming clubhouse, and the friendly atmosphere that pervades.

Measuring just under 6,200 yards off the back tees, the par-71 course is not long, but the undulating nature of the topography, clever bunkering, narrow fairways, and testing approaches, ensure that all elements of your game are examined and birdies are well earned. On my visit in late April, the course

was already looking in tremendous shape given the rotten winter, with the greens rolling fast and true despite the recent rains, and looking set to provide some superb playing conditions in the months ahead.

The course gets off to a testing start from both a physical and mental standpoint, with the first tee of this 404-yard uphill par four located within a few yards of the pro shop and in full view of the clubhouse. A par on this gun-barrel straight hole, which features OOB to the right and plays to a triple-tiered green, will feel like a stroke gained. Thankfully, things ease off at the 2nd, a 300-yard downhill par four that sweeps gently to the right, requiring little more than a three-wood to the left side of the fairway, and a deft chip to the angled green to set up the chance of an early birdie.

Shirley Park boasts a fabulous quartet of par threes, and the 3rd is arguably the easiest of them, which is saying something given



SHIRLEY PARK HAS BUILT UP AN ENVIABLE REPUTATION FOR THE QUALITY OF ITS GREENS

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that it plays over 160 yards to a green with a false front and a ridge running diagonally across the putting surface. With the wind in your face, it requires a solid strike to find the dance floor.

If you're hoping to go low at Shirley Park, you're going to need to birdie at least two of the three par fives – the 4th, 9th and 18th – all of which are reachable for the longest, straightest hitters. The 4th, at 518 yards, is the longest, but if you can get a good drive away, and avoid the fairway traps and greenside bunkers with your second, there's a good chance of recording red figures here.

The par-3 7th is a cracking short hole from whichever tee you play, with a 160-180 yard shot required over a valley to a raised green. Anything short or left of the target will tumble down a steep slope into some unsavoury gorse bushes, while there's no future for anything hit right. No pressure then...

The front nine finishes with one of my favourite holes on the course, a 512-yard par five that sweeps from right-to-left around a tree-lined fairway, requiring all of your course management skills to find the right spot from which to attack the green. Only a brave shot hugging the left side will cut off enough of the dogleg to set up a 200-yard plus second, while anything hit too far left will be blocked out.

Turning for home, the 300-yard 12th is a great little par four, with the green tucked around the corner almost at a right angle to



THE SPACIOUS CLUBHOUSE ENJOYS FINE VIEWS OVER THE COURSE

THE 472-YRD PAR-FIVE 18TH PROVIDES A STRONG FINISH TO THE ROUND

the end of the fairway, and the pin especially hard to reach if positioned in the extreme right-hand side. The 13th is a lovely par three played from a raised tee, located deep within the tree line, to a green that is protected by four bunkers on the left and a larger one on the right. It's only 150 yards, but I reckon some big numbers have been racked up here.

Par fours at 15 and 16, both doglegs, present birdie opportunities, providing you find the right portion of the fairway off the tee; while the 215-yard 17th will leave first timers scratching their heads looking for a flag, as the green is located some way distant over the brow of the hill.

The par-five 18th is a demanding closing hole, with the course's one and only water feature making its presence felt at around 210 yards on the right edge of the fairway, while bunkers to the left at 270 will catch big hitters who are marginally off line. Two traps short of the green will catch errant lay ups, while two more either side of the putting surface will ensure that whoever makes a birdie here will feel deserving of a celebratory drink in the clubhouse bar.

All told, it's a constantly entertaining and



THE VIEW BEHIND THE FIRST TEE

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challenging layout that is neither too severe, nor too easy. No two holes alike, and with some interesting changes in elevation, it's a course that you'll want to come back to again and again.

Shirley Park's skilled team of green staff, led by long-serving course manager Richard Evans, constantly strives to improve the quality of the course, and, in addition to the regular maintenance, special projects are undertaken every year to ensure standards are always on the up.

Maintaining and upgrading the characterful clubhouse is another ongoing commitment, and in the last year alone the dining room and kitchen have been refurbished, which will be much appreciated by everyone attending club events and functions of all kinds.

The club boasts a wide membership across both genders and ages, handicaps and backgrounds. There is currently no joining fee, with a seven-day membership (which includes a free 12-month membership for a partner) costing £1,504, and a five-day from £1,158. There is an academy membership for assisting non-golfers to learn the game, while also introducing them to the rules, etiquette, and, of course, the social side of the club. Many academy members go on to become full members, while every week there is an array of roll-ups to ensure that there is almost always a group to join at a time that fits in with individual work or family commitments.

Members can also participate in a wide range of competitions, both midweek and at weekends, and there are many individual

stroke play events, four ball and foursomes match play competitions for men and ladies, plus numerous mixed events. The club does not operate a tee booking system for members, so they can turn up, put their ball in the chute, and generally get a game when they like. Visitors can book online, and are welcome throughout the week, and after 2pm at weekends, with green fees starting from £38 for 18 holes.

The club also boasts an Indoor Tuition Centre, where the club's team of dedicated PGA professionals, led by Mick Taylor, can offer coaching and club fitting using the latest Trackman technology. There is an outside practice area and a practice putting and chipping green.

Shirley Park enjoys an active and well-supported social scene, with an event calendar featuring regular music evenings, quizzes, and horse racing nights, as well as formal club occasions. Even when there is not a function in the diary, there is invariably a buzz in the clubhouse, with members and visitors enjoying the excellent range of food and drinks on offer, while an 80-inch dropdown screen ensures there's always a lively atmosphere whenever there is sport on TV.

For non-golfers, social membership is available, which qualifies for all the above except golf, and includes use of the club's popular snooker tables.

The recently redesigned website provides a wealth of information on the course and club, with hole-by-hole flyers, booking forms for visitors/societies, and a special hospitality section highlighting the facilities available for groups, parties and conferences, which includes a spacious dining room that can comfortably accommodate up to 120 guests. **GN**



THE CHALLENGING 7TH IS ONE OF FOUR EXCELLENT SHORT HOLES ON THE CARD

INFORMATION

FOR MEMBERSHIP ENQUIRIES, SOCIETY AND CORPORATE BOOKINGS, VISIT WWW.SHIRLEYPARKGOLFCLUB.CO.UK, EMAIL CLUB MANAGER STEVE MURPHY AT STEVE.MURPHY@SHIRLEYPARKGOLFCLUB.CO.UK OR CALL 020 8654 1143.

FOR VISITOR GREEN FEE BOOKINGS CALL 020 8654 8767 OR BOOK ONLINE AT WWW.SHIRLEYPARKGOLFCLUB.CO.UK

