

Golf at Temple – so much more than a game

‘It was a morning when all nature shouted Fore! The breeze, as it blew gently up from the valley, seemed to bring a message of hope and cheer, whispering of chip shots holed and brassies landing squarely on the meat. The fairway, as yet unscarred by the irons of a hundred clubs, smiled greenly up at the azure sky.’ **PG Woodhouse**

‘No other game combines the wonder of nature with the discipline of sport in such carefully planned ways. A great golf course both frees and challenges a golfer’s mind.’ **Tom Watson**



‘The least thing upset him on the links. He missed short putts because of the uproar of the butterflies in the adjoining meadows.’ **PG Woodhouse**

‘Whenever golfers think of Temple, the first image that springs to mind must surely be the stunning view from the first tee – one of the most inviting opening drives in golf. On a crisp winter’s morning you look across the Thames Valley to the distant Chiltern Hills, just visible through the swirling mist.

In spring, the uplifting sight of a new season’s bright green leaves, and the smell of freshly mown fairways, with cowslips and early purple orchids peeping through the grass.



In summer, the River Thames shimmers and the spire of All Saints church in Marlow can be clearly see. The chalk downland meadow roughs quiver in the breeze and red kites glide on the thermals high in the sky above.

The view changes yet again in autumn, with every imaginable hue from richest yellow through golden browns to the deepest rust. The meadow roughs have

been harvested and the golf course looks almost naked compared to earlier in the year.

If there’s anything more pleasurable and relaxing than a game of golf with friends it’s a round with the added attraction of seeking and sometimes discovering on the way, endangered, rare, uncommon and

valuable species of flora and fauna. Even to the wildest hitters, much of Temple is 'out of play', and some of the habitats are of national importance.'

Origins of Temple Golf Club course

(from the *Millennial Review*)

The Temple Links, as the course was first known, was designed by Willie Park Junior, a native of Musselburgh. In 1901 he had designed two nearby courses, Sunningdale and Huntercombe, and was the first to go into print on golf course design. A Captain G Macdonald (late Grenadier Guards) realised the potential in 'this 140 acres of well-known and beautiful Temple Park, situated on the right bank of the Thames ...' and formed a company to run the new golf club.



The course was described in the first handbook as 'consisting more or less of a series of ridges which have been skilfully utilised so that unnecessary fatigue is avoided, there is very little that is not uninteresting.' The hilly chalklands ensured – and still do – great drainage and an absence of the mud and casual water common to many inland courses. At the same time the natural bent and fescue grasses did not burn up in a dry summer. Many specimen trees had been planted in Temple Park during the 19th century and these were integrated into the course design.

During the early part of the century the greenkeepers' tools were sickles, scythes, forks and spades, with fairway mowing equipment draw by horses. The old stables still stand behind the 16th tee. Sheep grazed the hillsides. A local farmer cut and baled the hay, and this encouraged an abundance of flora including six different varieties of orchid. Hare, deer, partridge and pheasant wandered across the course. Ducks and geese could be seen on the marshes which ran through the fields beside the 9th hole.

In the early days there were many grass bunkers and very narrow fairways. Seven green staff maintained the course with the help of local boys who hand weeded the green for 6d an hour. Cecil Alder said in his memoirs: '... the whole course had twice as much rough than it has nowadays and in spring and summer you usually lost your ball if you were more than a foot off the fairway.'

(The main differences from the present layout are in the table which follows)

The years of the 20th century have been marked by advances in technology and also by changing fashion in golf course design and management. These have brought about many detailed changes in the presentation of the course. For example, at one time Raymond Oppenheimer (whose family own the land and who himself was an accomplished scratch player) reacted against excessive lushness in the condition of the greens. He wanted the greens and part of the fairways over-sown but only with fine grasses. On the other hand, he did ask for American-style lushness in 1961 when the Walker Cup team practised at Temple in preparation for the match in the United States. Later, in the early 70s, the



demand for lushness was unstoppable. A green pop-up irrigation system as installed at Temple. American-style golf was beginning to have an effect on members who were demanding the greener greens and softer fairways they were seeing at courses like Augusta. The soft greens also helped golfers to control the new hard golf balls that were coming into fashion.

The membership of clubs was increasing in response to the boom in the sport. More rounds were being played. More effective winter clothing was leading to greater damage during the non-growing season. Little or no irrigation was being undertaken and there was excessive use of watering and nitrogen-based fertilisers. The old English hay meadows were cut back and an intensive mowing regime was introduced from boundary to boundary. The removal of hay meadows led to losses in flora and fauna, a matter which has divided golfers and non-golfers for many years.



So, over the years the Temple course has changed – and continues to change. Many trees – like the larch stands on the 3rd, 4th, 15th holes and the silver birches on

the 1st, 2nd, 6th, 7th, 12th and 17th holes – were added by Raymond Oppenheimer and Tommy Potts for strategic purposes. Some stands are of mixed deciduous trees, like those to the right of the 5th and 6th holes, and include hornbeam, Turkey oak and Norway maple. It is planned to gradually replace the non-native species (larch especially)



with native beech and oak, even some new disease-free elm. Limes to commemorate former members have more recently been added down the right of the 12th fairway. Many of the larger trees – beech, sycamore, copper beech, horse chestnut and lime in particular – testify to the landscape's former place as part of glorious Temple Park within the Bisham Abbey estate.

There are also exceptional or unusual trees: the evergreen Mediterranean holm (or holly) oaks on the 2nd, 8th and 12th holes; the Blue Atlantic Cedars and Indian bean tree to the left on the 18th; the numerous Black (or Corsican) Pine that often outshine their native cousins, the Scots Pine; the walnut trees on the 11th, 15th and 16th holes; a magnificent field maple on the left on the 9th; the cornelian cherry to the left of the 14th green; the trio of narrow-leaved ash – all fiery gold and red in autumn – above the 7th green along with wild cherry, seen right in bloom. Elsewhere ornamental crab apple, hawthorn and maple suggest the female touch in the Temple display.

And the course is also home to three important areas of ancient woodland: Mungden Wood separates the 1st and 4th holes; Badger Wood divides the 7th and 9th holes; and a slice of Carpenter's (Bypass) Wood which now straddles the A404, screens the 12th, 14th and 15th holes from that busy road. Not much yew survives in woodland formerly characterised by this species along with beech and oak. The



now ubiquitous and vigorous ash (regarded as a 'weed' in this landscape) has a strong foothold though it is under threat from a dieback disease just as the elms, traces of which survives along the Temple perimeter, fell victim to in the past. The ancient woodlands are vitally important as a habitat for the non-golfing residents of the site – the deer, foxes and other mammals, birds, butterflies and moths, insects, fungi and an understorey of shade-loving plant life. Within are signs of the important place wood occupied in a pre-industrial, more land-based society – hazel and wych elm which

was coppiced and used for construction and other purposes. Sorbus (whitebeam), elder, dog rose and rowan add dots of colour amid the hues of green and brown. The hedgerows and margins include hawthorn, blackthorn, buckthorn, elm, spindle, wild privet, cherry laurel and conifer – some introduced to dampen the noise of the bypass roaring beyond.

The Temple site also includes a former tree nursery – it was even used to grow potatoes – located between the 17th and 14th fairways. It remains a patchwork cluster of conifer, deciduous trees and shrubbery, overlooking the horse chestnut, now bent with age, at the end of the practice area.

Temple's golf course has not finished changing yet, but it is most certainly alive and well. Recently observed just as one trio were about to blast their tee shots toward the first green on a Saturday morning, a young red fox sauntered out of the rough below the 18th hole, paused in front of the tee and gazed thoughtfully at the players for a moment before slipping silently into Mungden Wood. We would all do well to return the courtesy – to pause and gaze at Temple's many natural delights.

Hole	Original/modern changes at Temple
1st	Trees on right have replaced grass bunkers
2nd	No back tee. All tees located where red now is. Elm trees behind green
3rd	Large grass bunker short of green on right
4th	Tee on mound in dell by 1 st fairway. Line of huge grass bunkers short of fairway
5th	Large grass bunker across path from tee
6th	Trees to right and left of fairway have replaced grass bunkers
7th	Sometimes played from tee behind 10 th tee. No trees by the green
8th	Unaltered. Wooden hut open for drinks served by caddy master's wife
9th	No back tee. Two grass bunkers preceded two sand bunkers in deference to good drives from white tee
10th	No greenside bunker at first then a sand bunker which protruded well into green. Known as Raymond's Folly. Grass bunker at top of bank
11th	Large grass bunker 20 yards short of green. Sand bunker at bottom of fairway hollow
12th	Clump of trees behind green has replaced elm (killed by bullets from Home Guard who placed practice targets on the trunk)
13th	A long hole played along practice area and parallel to 14 th fairway. Green by large chestnut tree
14th	A shorter hole (par 3) with large bunker guarding it
15th	
16th	Formerly a par four with tee on what is now Burchetts Green roundabout. Fewer trees to left and right of fairway.
17th	Trees on left a late addition to protect houses, not the dog leg it now is for most
18th	Far fewer trees, especially on right greenside