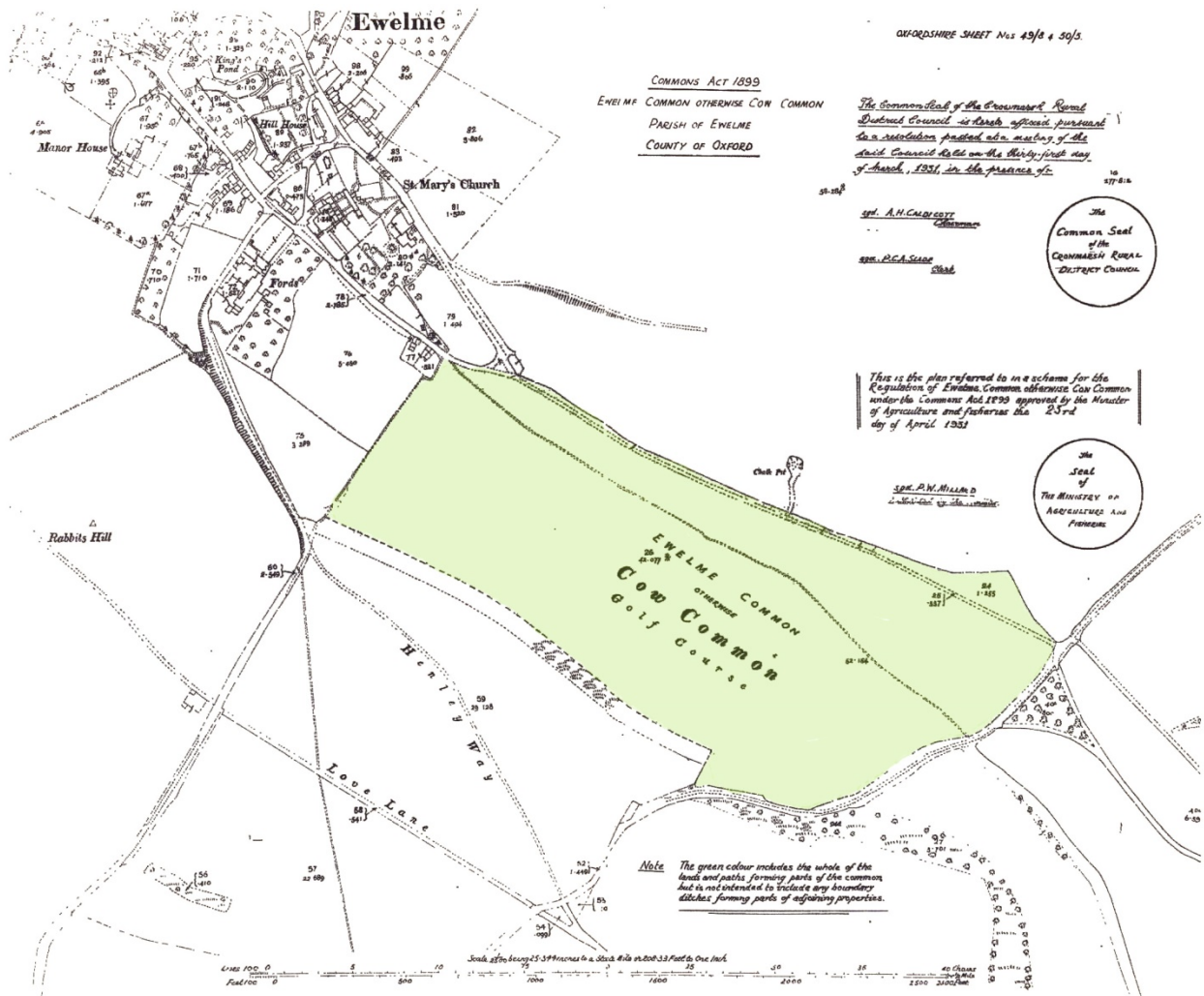


Ewelme Golf Club (circa 1891-1921)

Ewelme News, Feb/Mar 2024

Sometime in the early 1890s, Lester Palmer, 32-year-old ‘gentleman of independent means’, living at ‘The Aloes’ (formerly known as ‘Monogram House’ and later named ‘High House’), had the seemingly impossible idea for using a portion of the Common for a 9-hole golf course, where he and other socially prominent local gentry could play their favourite game. The course was to be laid out at the far end of the then open Common, (distanced from the area where grazing rights holders herded a few cattle). The undulating topography seemed to pose no problem to the many keen golfers who enthusiastically supported the plan. A large amount of money was raised to lay out the new course with its greens and hazards - although the 9th hole had to be situated across the road by the Icknield Way T-junction.



Membership applications were made to the Hon-Sec. the Rev. G W M Hamilton, of ‘Ivy Bank’, and the first recorded monthly handicap was held in November 1893. The names of the early members reflect the great and the good of the area, including Lord Somervell (later of the Old Rectory), Mr Charles Schunk of the Old Mill House, Mr John and Mrs Leila Eagle-Bott of Hill House, Rector Simcox and Col. F Gosset (of Watlington). Author Jerome K Jerome wrote that when he was at home at ‘Troy’, he would drive down in his pony and trap for a game. He did however grumble that ‘there were far too many bunkers!’



Monthly competitions over 18 holes were held with a silver medal as a prize – a competitor who won twice in succession kept the prize. The first competition in June 1894 was won by Mr W Wells who beat seven other competitors 126-18 total 108. Rector Simcox trailed with a score of 220-18 total 202.

Membership was advertised for distant golfers to travel to enjoy the picturesque surroundings, and if required, clean and comfortable accommodation was available at The Greyhound and Lamb Inns. Initial subscription charges are not recorded, but in 1906 introductory visitors' fees were 1 shilling a day, 2/6d a week and 10/- a month. Ladies and young players paid 5/- a month. By 1914 the subscriptions for gentlemen were £1 guinea and ladies 10/6d. It is recorded the Golf Club Annual General Meetings were held in a club room – but unfortunately the site is not identified.

The March 1895 AGM reported a membership of 40, of which 20 had joined in the previous year. The Club was thriving and the Parish Council Minutes of 1895 and 1896 recorded '*The Ewelme Golf Club wished to donate a monetary gift to the Parish Council to be used at its discretion.*' The Weedon Blanket Charity was chosen, and in November 1896 the Charity's Trustees expended a gift of £2 on blankets for Mr ? Winfield, Henry Justin, James Tanner, Edwin Winfield, Mr ? Green, Mrs Harmer, Widow Barrett, Henry Tuckwell, Samuel Winfield, Richard Winfield, George Munday and Widow Thornton. (This arrangement was still operating in 1905).

Ewelme's Golfing Legends

At the March 1899 AGM, Lester Palmer, a scratch player, was elected captain. His wife Fanny was no golf widow, being a competent player and often Ladies Champion. In that month's competition for the Ladies' Medal, she scored 57+2-59, tying with Miss Manley on 79-20-59. In the October 1899 competition, the first of the 20 players set off at 10.0 am with Lester Palmer predictably winning the Gentleman's Prize, and Fanny Palmer winning the Ladies, beating Mrs Aldworth. Other lady players mentioned in that competition were Miss Hampden (probably the young Moira Hampden Calvert from 'The Old Mansion' at Cottesmore) and Miss Jervis from 'The Manor'. The prizes were generously donated by the Treasurer, Mr Edwin Burkitt, of 'Belaugh House', (later renamed 'New Place' and now 'Loreto') at Tidmarsh Lane where Mrs Burkitt entertained the competitors to tea.

GOLF CLUB.—A match took place at Peppard on Saturday, June 22nd, between this club and a team from Ewelme, under the captaincy of Mr. Lester Palmer. The Ewelme club proved victors. The following being the score:—

EWELME.		PEPPARD.	
L. Palmer ..	0	H. Taylor ..	1
Colonel Lawson ..	1	Major Cotesworth ..	0
E. Burmester ..	1	A. L. Goudby ..	0
E. Somerville ..	1	E. Fryer ..	0
C. Schunck ..	1	Dr. Robinson ..	0
W. Neill ..	1	Rev. V. Denis-Browne	0
Mrs. Palmer..	0	Mrs. Fleming ..	1
	5		2

Foursomes were played in the afternoon, also resulting in a win for Ewelme.



From the Henley and South Oxfordshire Standard Friday 28 June 1907

Club Captain Lester and wife Fanny continued to be the top scoring players; in 1906 he was the amateur record holder with a score of 39. Records show the Ewelme players, competed with surrounding local Clubs winning in April 1900 against Goring & Streatley, and Reading in that October. In June 1907 they beat Peppard and in October 1908 were victorious against Wallingford.

The End of a Happy Era

Members played through the First World War and beyond, but in August 1921 the Berks, Bucks & Oxon Advertiser stated that efforts to restart the Club had failed and it was to be closed. Members who had left their golf clubs at the clubhouse were required to reclaim them. After existing for almost 31 years Ewelme Golf Club was no more. The enterprising founder Lester Palmer died in 1939 aged 80, whilst Fanny lived until 1950 to age 87 - having downsized to one of the line of cottages called 'London House' in the High Street. (The churchyard contains their graves, and their tragically young children - a daughter Daisy, who died aged 4 in 1894 and a son Victor, injured fighting in WW1, who died aged 24 in 1920 at the Warneford Mental Hospital).

The golf course continued to be shown on the Ordnance Survey Map until 1944, although old villagers recounted the common had deteriorated into scrubland before it was requisitioned in WWII to be ploughed for the war effort. It was not decommissioned until 1948 and it took another decade before the sports field was created and the subsequent pavilion built, providing suitable facilities for a much wider section of village sportsmen and women to play their games.

Ewelme Village Archive