

Rothley Park Golf Club is Born

1911



An article in the Leicester Daily Post on the 2nd of February 1911 has a detailed description of the work involved in the construction of the course and the clubhouse.

“The new golf course at Rothley Park is now taking shape. A force of about forty men are busily at work under the able superintendence of Tom Williamson. No expense is being spared in the formation of the tees and greens and since the work commenced about two months ago very good progress has been made. The fine old turf from Rothley Temple Park is being used to form the greens. In the opinion of Tom Williamson, it will be one of the pretties and most sporting courses in the county. It is expected that 12 holes will be ready for play by the end of May.

The picturesque clubhouse is now in course of construction. It will be replete with every convenience and have a club and billiard room, luncheon room, dressing rooms, a broad veranda and spacious terrace from which splendid views will be obtained of the course. About one hundred members have already sent in their names”.

- August 1911 - The first committee meeting of the newly formed Rothley Park Golf Club takes place. Course and House committees are formed.

The First Golf Boom

Rothley Park Golf Course was built during a time of unprecedented growth in the number of golf courses. In 1890 there were 90 courses in England and by 1894 the total had doubled to 182. There was then a dramatic expansion to no less than 655 by 1914. RPGC was the fifth, eighteen hole course to be built in Leicestershire by 1911. The first pre 1914 expansion in England resulted in many courses being built on unsuitable, poorly drained and heavy land. Golf then, was largely a summer game, as Bernard Darwin observed “ No gentleman played golf before the first of May” and that golf “was a game played by a few gentlemen and most Scotsmen”

1912

James Sorley

Rothley Park's first professional appointed in February 1912.



James Sorley, born in St Andrews in 1886 took up golf as a teenager and before turning professional was a scratch golfer. He left St. Andrews in 1910 to take up the position of Professional at Carlsbad Golf Club in the Czech Republic (then part of the Austro Hungarian Empire). When RPGC advertised the job of professional, James Sorley was chosen from 150 applicants.

In those days being the professional of a golf club included a wide range of roles. Clubmaking, teaching (2 shillings per hour), playing with members (2 shillings and sixpence per round) as well as caddy master and greenkeeper (4 boys worked on the course and acted as caddies).

In addition to his duties as professional at Rothley he also wrote regular golf columns for the St. Andrews Gazette, Dundee Courier and Evening Telegraph. These articles still exist and have been a great help in piecing together the early history of the club.

Rothley Park Official Opening

May 1912



The official opening of Rothley Park Golf Club attracted a number of distinguished guests.

- Front row centre - Frederick Merttens
- Front, second from the left - The Earl of Lanesborough
- Front, fourth from the left - James Braid. Winner of 5 British Opens
- Front, fourth from the right – Harry Vardon. Winner of 6 British Opens and 1 US Open
- Back row, third from the right – J.H.Taylor. Winner of 5 British Opens
- Back, extreme right – James Sorley

It is noteworthy that on the original photograph none of the ladies are named. Perhaps, no surprise, since the month before this photograph was taken, the House of Commons defeated a bill to give women the vote.

Next week:

- **Braid and Vardon exhibition match – who wins and what did they score ?**
- **Sorley breaks the course record**