

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

David Rennie, who was Captain of the Club in 1994-96, has recently taken over from Roy Burnett as Club Archivist. Over the next few weeks, David is going to delve into our history books and remind us of some of the key events which have helped shape the Club over the years.

Having recently held an SGM which touched on the views from the Clubhouse, in the first of two articles on the history of the Clubhouse, David explores the controversy surrounding its relocation.

A VISION OF THINGS TO COME

The other day I chanced upon a copy of the 2003 Spring Newsletter which, in a section headed 'CLUBHOUSE SGM', narrated that on Thursday 20 February 2003 an SGM had been held in the Marcliffe Hotel to consider the options for the clubhouse. There were two resolutions, namely:

- (Resolution 1) calling for a vote on whether to refurbish the existing clubhouse or construct a new build; and
- (Resolution 2) calling for, depending of outcome of Resolution 1, a vote to adopt one of six development schemes.

The Newsletter went on to note that by large majorities (approx. 80% in both cases) the membership had voted for a new building and for redevelopment scheme No 5 and finished with the comment that the *"necessary detailed work has now been put in hand and if things go according to plan the first activity (earthmoving works) will commence on Monday 8 September 2003 immediately after the Centenary week. The new holes 16 and 17, replacing the loss of the 1st and 18th holes, will also be undertaken expeditiously as will the necessary adjustments to the 9 hole-course"*.

Scheme No 5 was the option which relocated the clubhouse to its current position. To quote the Club's website: *"Members can justifiably be proud of their magnificent new clubhouse which was completed in December 2004. Members, guests and visitors can relax in comfort and enjoy the surroundings which are complimented by the stunning views over the 18th green and the valleys of Royal Deeside"*. Few would argue with that sentiment.

The somewhat prosaic wording in the 2003 Spring Newsletter did however belie the turmoil within the Club generated by the passing of Resolution 2, centred around the 'Save the 1st campaign'. Although the decisions taken at the 2003 SGM have proved to be the right ones, events in the immediate aftermath of the vote created considerable tensions within the Club - the telling of which is perhaps for another day.

The purpose of this article is rather to reflect on the fact that when it comes to discussion and heated debate over clubhouse development options the Club has been down that road a number of times before!

The original clubhouse was built in 1904 on the highest part of the Club's property in the vicinity of the present buggy storage building - in today's terms on the right side of the driveway opposite the pitching facility - and remained pretty much intact until 1963. At that time Council proposed the construction of a new clubhouse (estimated cost £18,500) but that idea was abandoned in favour of alterations and refurbishment (estimated cost £13,500) - a shade of things to come.

By the early 1980s the clubhouse was by common consent badly in need of a major upgrade. In 1981 a local building company, Aberdeen Construction Group (**ACG**), made an unsolicited approach to the Club with a proposal for a new clubhouse. The deal offered was remarkably ambitious, its essential elements being that ACG would:

- acquire 19.5 acres of the Club's land (in effect the whole of the westmost portion including the clubhouse and all other buildings, the car parking areas and the then 1st, 2nd (part only), 17th and 18th holes;

- construct a new clubhouse in the wooded area to the east of the present 14th green plus 2 semi-detached dwelling houses, green keepers' sheds, car parking for 120 cars, a bowling green and a new access road.
- pay for the fees of a golf course architect to come up with alternative course layout(s) - in this regard the Club had in 1969 purchased 80 acres of land at West Cults Farm and how best to use this ground had been the subject of discussion by successive Councils throughout the previous decade; and
- pay the Club £900k (or £925k if the bowling green was not wanted).

The proposal, which was conditional upon ACG obtaining planning consent for 120 houses, was controversial to put it mildly. In a letter to the members in September 1982 the Captain, Leslie Robertson, indicated that Council had taken the view that *"it had a duty to investigate the proposals fully so that when a Special General Meeting is called, members will be in possession of as much information as possible"*. A SGM was subsequently convened for Sunday 20 February 1983. Council must have known the writing was on the wall because it made no recommendation either for or against for the proposal. According to a press report of the SGM proceedings, Scott Finnie, former club champion, immediately captured the mood by describing the plan as 'an abomination'. The proposal was rejected by 237 votes to 13.

As a footnote it was however interesting to read in the same press article that Dr Norman Scott, the Captain when AGC first approached the Club in 1981, was quoted as saying *"a new clubhouse would eventually have to built on the lower level"* and that he *"had a vision of a new clubhouse on the lower ground with three nine-hole lay-outs"*. He was only partly right but prescient words nevertheless.

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Club Archivist