



# GARY GALYEAN'S GOLF LETTER®

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Dear Subscriber:

## Think of England

Without contest the world's greatest linksland golf is found on the shores of Great Britain and Ireland. The names can be recited by all who have been charmed, humiliated, bedazzled, and fortunate enough to have played them.

It is, however, the smaller, less familiar, less visited courses of England that bring greater satisfaction and enjoyment in the wake of strenuous visits to their championship cousins. This may be a little misleading as 13 of the world's first 100 can be found in England and, we would argue, that number should be higher.

Play is generally faster, starting times easier to book, the food better, whisky the same, and there is always time for the conviviality that is often lost when accumulating a list of the world's most notable courses you have played.

"Think of England," a dear friend often whispers to his opponent when trying to put him off an important putt. It usually has the opposite effect. We are always delighted to be in the English countryside, warmed by its scale, architecture, meadows, coal fires, and the sense of what needs to be done and how. It is a welcomed step back into a slower world.

### Saunton Near Braunton, Devonshire

SEATED BESIDE THE PICTURE WINDOW, we were swarmed by the summer sun as we lunched upon salad, salmon, and new potatoes after the morning's round of golf. The long, single story clubhouse has its lounge, bar, and dining rooms arranged single-file along the front

where members and their guests can overlook the practice green and the 18<sup>th</sup> green, and where access is easy to a small, covered porch and steps leading down to the links. We carried a small brandy onto the porch where the shade, breeze, and benches were welcoming.

Conversation regarding the history of the Club — established in 1897, the year of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, and the patent of the three-piece Haskell ball; and a year before the last cavalry charge of the British Empire at Omdurman — quietly disintegrated as our attention was drawn to the special scene that lay before us reminiscent of Henry James' comment that the words *summer afternoon* are the most beautiful in the English language.

It is from the nearby Saunton Sands Hotel that you can enjoy the long, high views of the estuaries of the Taw and the Torridge, the Pebble Ridge, Westward Ho!, Barnstable Bay, and the Isle of Lundy. But the Saunton G.C. clubhouse sits intentionally below the blustery heights of the Westcountry ridges where, in similar fashion to the golf course, it instinctively finds shelter amongst the dunes of the links.

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So expansive is the linksland at Saunton that comparisons have been made to Ballybunion in the west of Ireland. Because of its size, seaside access and location in the south of England, the original east course was used as a training ground by U.S. armored divisions preparing for the invasion of Normandy. Herbert Fowler's original design was lost for this reason. Photographs of the training exercises are proudly displayed on the clubhouse walls.

From our perch on the porch, both the east and west courses stretched out before us protected from the sea by the Pebble Ridge that runs the length of the dunes and atop of which flurried a series of large, red flags indicating wind and surf conditions. To the left rose the rolling, cultivated hills and hedge rows that Thomas Hardy mortared into our memory across the pages of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* – the latter published just six years before the Club was established.

Indeed, names of the holes repeat in sound and cadence like Hardy's words: Gullpit, Lobb, Tiddler, Yeland, Anstead's Humps, Homeward, Fowler, Goodban, Isaac's Slopes, Hartland, Covey, Thyme, Evening Primrose, Rookery.

The east course, as restored after World War II, is lamented by the members only because of its fifteen par 4s, three par 3s, and no par 5s. However, the 4s fall in varying lengths and configurations into a delightful syncopation. From the medal tees the 1<sup>st</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> can be stretched to play as 5s, thereby leaving the course with a respectable total length of 6,708 yards. So highly regarded is Saunton's golf and setting that the British, Canadian, and U.S. Seniors Golf Associations held their international triangular matches here in June 1994.

For Sir Peter Allen, it was the wild flowers that engrossed him:

*Saunton is renowned for its wild flowers and a visit at the end of June found the links bright with blue viper's bugloss, like small delphiniums, and pink orchis of several varieties; the hellebore orchis was not yet out, but there was a mild yellow variety that was. The rough contains willow scrub and sycamore and in remoter spots the violent thorny incorrigible buckthorn.*

Across the mouth of the Tay estuary, approximately two miles to the southeast, the flags of Royal North Devon fly in the breeze. Like other British clubs that lie in close proximity to one another, Saunton and Royal North Devon share unusual competitions involving both courses. Most notable is a foursomes competition with a record of 49 strokes taken to play from the 1<sup>st</sup> tee of



Tag Galyean. *Saunton Golf Club*. 1995.

Saunton's east course to the 18<sup>th</sup> hole of Royal North Devon. In order to ease the journey, amphibious vehicles and operators were loaned by the military to transport competitors across the estuary.

*Hidden gem* is an overworked term and

probably an overworked aspiration in this time of massive information distribution. Everyone wants to find their own hidden gem and usually are so quick to tell their good news that *hidden* must be struck from the locution. We simply point out that it was wonderful to find so highly-regarded and widely-known a course that has also found protection in the fact that it's a solid, three-hour drive from Heathrow Airport even with a mad Englishman at the wheel of a sub-sonic two-seater and champing at the bit to take the first tee and the first pound from a jet-lagged Yankee infidel.

### Rye Camber, Rye, East Sussex

*Rye is the ideal place for the golfer who is wearied out with a fortnight's fruitless balloting at St. Andrews, which has resulted in his once drawing a time, and that at 12:30 ... The two great features of golf at Rye are the uniformly fiendish behavior of the wind and the fascinating variety of stances.*

Bernard Darwin

REGARDLESS OF THE ASSAULTS to institutions, manners, and a more proper style of living, which we all feel in varying degrees, it is still possible to escape the onslaught of what one friend refers to as *the corporate gorillas* and lunch in the sunlit bar at Rye overlooking the course and the Channel and feel that the proprieties of a fulfilling world are ordered and respected.

While three ball and four ball matches are at times permitted, the Club makes it clear that they have no standing. Singles and foursomes take precedence. Others stand aside. With the invasion of overseas requests for

four ball stroke play, there are times when Rye—ranked 54<sup>th</sup> in the world—simply does not permit it. It goes to the essence of the original game and a preference for its earliest format.

Rye is the home of the Oxford and Cambridge Golfing Society, which holds its annual competition for the President's Putter here each January. In the 98-year history of the tournament, it has been cancelled only once due to weather—1979 for heavy snow.

Two of the President's Putters are displayed on the walls of the Clubhouse. The first was the club used by Hugh Kirkaldy when he won the 1891 Open Championship, and used again by John L. Low, the society's first president, when he reached the Amateur final. The second was the club of W.T. Linskill, who introduced golf to Cambridge University. In the area beside the bar hangs a letter from Sir Winston Churchill accepting honorary membership.

There is a ridge of sandhills that runs the length of the course and is frequently in play, as is a less important ridge parallel to it but nearer to the sea.

Harry S. Colt, who became the most noted of all golf course designers, laid out Rye with Douglas Rolland in 1894. Mr. Colt was 25 years old. He had studied law at Cambridge where he was also captain of the golf team.

The out nine at Rye is perhaps the most compact nine holes you can play anywhere. Lacing its way across and along a series of sandhills, the routing appears to take less than 40 acres to accomplish its course. The holes and dunes are arranged so that the prevailing wind from the sea always seems to be blowing across the line to the green. The first three holes fall to one side of the dune, the remarkable 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> run on top, and the balance along the opposite side, also exposed to the sea.

The second nine is cut by the same row of sandhills. Extraordinary for a links course, it includes a lake at the 11<sup>th</sup>, the result of dredging for gravel. The 13<sup>th</sup>, named Sea Hole, requires a carry with the second shot over a rampart of sandhills to a hidden green below. The 16<sup>th</sup> includes a ridge to be carried from the tee and then a long iron to the green lying sheltered by the dune.

Rye is exacting and intriguing – a Club many Englishmen prefer to all others because it is off the beaten track and because of its traditions. Donald Steel writes that his daydreams revolve most frequently around Rye:

*There is a gentle breeze from the sea, the small boats with their coloured sails glide down past the harbour as the sun highlights the little town on its hill like a scene from fairy-land.*



*There is about the journey out across the marsh a sense of expectation I feel nowhere else, a feeling heightened by a heavy tinge of relief that Rye's future was salvaged when wartime disaster stared it full in the*

*face. The last of the flying bombs virtually demolished the clubhouse, while barbed wire, mines and concrete fortification were strewn across the course. Its restoration was in doubt through lack of funds but happily a faithful few came to the rescue. Rye was reborn to rise to even greater heights.*

### **Worplesdon Woking, Surrey**

**L**AST ISSUE, WE WROTE about Woking and its place among the important heathland courses of Surrey. Worplesdon is of the same vintage and allure. It was laid out in 1908 by a doctor's son, John Frederick Abercromby (1861 - 1935), who took up golf in his youth and was a competitive force in matches around the London area. He was hired at the turn of the century as the private secretary to a financier. Compelled as he was by Sunningdale, Walton Heath, and Woking, the financier directed Mr. Abercromby to build a course for him.

Mr. Abercromby, sometimes called "Aber" felt equal to the task although he had never designed a course before. He undertook the routing and layout of the course, and consulted about the greens and bunkers with the indefatigable Willie Park Jr. The result was the resplendent Worplesdon.

At the Worplesdon bar it would not be surprising to discover Bertie Wooster, Cuthbert Banks, Mr. Mulliner or various hangers on from the coffee room of the Goose and Gherkin—a P.G. Wodehouse enclave for those dedicated to social entertainment, proper behavior, and



the sordid process of taming a golf ball. "Few things draw men together more surely than a mutual inability to master golf, coupled with an intense and ever-increasing love for the game," wrote Mr. Wodehouse in *A WOMAN IS ONLY A WOMAN*. And few Clubs within the English landscape more accurately reflect the fabric of such companionship than does the appropriately staid and polished world of Worplesdon.

It is impossible to hear the word Worplesdon without the word *foursomes* following on immediately. Indeed, the Worplesdon Mixed Foursomes has been a premier amateur competition since 1921. For several decades it held the status and admiration of all those who were swept off their feet by the explosive popularity of golf during and following the Roaring Twenties.

The red brick and wooden Clubhouse sits just slightly above the car park and welcomes you graciously as you step into the quiet patina of its historical regard. This is a fine place. Along the hallway are the plaques attesting to the winners of the mixed foursomes. Time after time appear the names of brother and sister, Joyce and Roger Wethered. During the 18 tournaments held between 1921 and 1938, either Wethered were in the final on 11 occasions. Miss Wethered won eight times with seven different partners, one of whom was her brother, and another of whom was Bernard Darwin. Miss Wethered appeared once again in the final as Lady Heathcoat-Amory, playing with her husband Sir John, in 1948. They were defeated 5 and 4.

Lady Heathcoat-Amory was Worplesdon's most famous member. Bobby Jones commented that hers was the best swing he ever saw. "Whatever other stars may arise one thing is certain," wrote Mr. Darwin, "those who saw this truly great golfer in her prime will never admit

comparisons, but will say with pardonable prejudice, 'Ah, but you never saw Miss Wethered.'" She was Worplesdon's Lady Captain in 1922.

On a small table in the Worplesdon lounge there is an exquisite bronze statue of Miss Wethered, which should not be missed. In addition to her foursomes triumphs, she was four times the Ladies' Open Champion and was known internationally to compete with the finest male and female players of her day.

In 1958, the late Lady Angela Bonallack and her husband, Sir Michael, became the first married couple to win the Worplesdon Mixed Foursomes.

Like all the finer heathland courses that lie south of London, Worplesdon has a pleasing change of elevation that makes the walking more enjoyable and the golf more intriguing. The out nine includes a wonderful par-3 at the 7<sup>th</sup>, which plays 201 yards from the medal tees to a large green guarded by a beautifully shaped bunker. The inward nine begins with the unusual feature of a pond at the short 10<sup>th</sup>, which is navigated on foot along a shaded path that leads around its shore. The story goes that during a competition an older lady scored 38 strokes at this single hole. Knowing that she was unable to propel her ball the 100 yards needed to clear the pond, she chose to putt along the footpath to the green.

Lunch is served at linen covered tables overlooking the practice green and the course. You may encounter the Oldest Member here. If so, remember Mr. Wodehouse's observation:

*The eye of the Oldest Member was thoughtful and reflective. When it looked into yours you saw in that perfect peace, that peace beyond understanding, which comes at its maximum only to the man who has given up golf.*

For J.M.S.:



*"But that night, as he sat smoking his after-dinner cigarette, Reason, so violently expelled, came stealing timidly back to her throne, and a cold hand seemed suddenly placed upon his heart."*

Sir P.G. Wodehouse  
THE CUSTODY OF THE PUMPKIN

Yours vly truly,

Gary A. Galyean  
Editor & Publisher

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