



## LINGFIELD PARK GOLF CLUB

Lingfield Park Golf Club opened on Sunday 20th June 1987, with a pro/am competition and an evening reception. The golf course was built on farmland which for many years formed part of the Lingfield Park estate. The estate comprises some 500 acres of what was once marginal agricultural land developed in medieval times out of wet deciduous woodland.

The racecourse opened in 1890 but it was nearly one hundred years later before the estate's potential as a golf course was realised by Ron Muddle, who bought Lingfield Park from Ladbrokes in 1982. Construction started three years later. Thirteen holes were built on the woods and field between the railway line and the racecourse, and five on the western side of the mile straight. Advantage was taken of the poor drainage, that for years had dogged the racecourse and was one of the reasons for building the all-weather track, by creating a number of attractive water features. Indeed, the fairway of one hole, the seventeenth, used to be a millpond. The clubhouse, now extensively altered, was originally used as a stable lads' changing accommodation which, at the time, gave rise to a number of wry comments.

The golf course was built at a time when it was extremely difficult to join a members' club. Waiting lists were measured in years and were open only to golfers who had a handicap, and you could only get a handicap if you were a member of a golf club affiliated to the English Golf Union. This catch 22 situation was broken by the advent of proprietary clubs such as Lingfield Park. Others in the area include Chartham Park, Edenbridge, Sweetwoods and Bletchingley. Lingfield's original membership included individuals from all over south London. This has gradually changed as the boom times of the 1980s gave way to a more austere economic climate that in turn impacted on members' clubs waiting lists. Many of Lingfield's early members who travelled a distance for their weekly game of golf have been able to join their local club.

One advantage Lingfield Park had, in what developed as a very competitive scramble to gain and retain members, was that the golf course had been developed as one of the most challenging in the south of England and which was regularly used by the Surrey Golf Union for professional competitions. Moreover, golf club members have always had the added perk of being entitled to a racing badge.

From the outset the golf club was an integral part of the racecourse complex. Ron Muddle sold the estate to Leisure Investments in 1987 for £7m but within months of the opening of the new all-weather track the company went into receivership. The receivers resisted the suggestion of a members' buy-out of the golf club, which was

probably just as well as the new owners, Lingfield Park (1991) Ltd., part of the T J Hemming Group, had access to capital for both the golf course and the clubhouse development, which the members would have been hard pressed to match.

In 1997 the golf club celebrated its tenth anniversary by publishing a history of the club which can be read in Lingfield library. Since then the group has been reconstructed and ownership is now vested in Arena Leisure who have plans to develop the complex further. But for the fledgling golf club, which featured only in the last decade or so of the History of Lingfield in the Twentieth Century, the principal impact it has had in that time, apart from the added employment and leisure opportunities for the locality, is in the remarkable number of early junior members who have gone on to forge careers in the golfing industry, both as green-keeping staff and in golf club management.

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