



PHOTO: Courtesy of Richard Latham

SV Hotchkin: golf's military mind

Jonathan Gaunt tells the story of the wealthy Lincolnshire landowner who is largely responsible for one of England's finest inland courses

Stafford Vere Hotchkin served with the Leicestershire Yeomanry in the First World War. In 1920, soon after his return to England, he purchased his home course, Woodhall Spa, in Lincolnshire. Between 1922-1926 he remodelled it with the assistance of Cecil Key Hutchison, already a renowned golf architect. The original course at Woodhall Spa consisted of just nine holes designed by Harry Vardon, later extended to eighteen by Harry Colt. It was this layout that Hotchkin remodelled, retaining only one of Colt's greens.

Soon after completing work at Woodhall Spa, Hotchkin set up his golf course consulting company, Ferigna. The firm dealt with all aspects of the golf course business including design, construction, maintenance, equipment, turf dressings and seed. Together with a friend, Arthur Taylor, who owned a local foundry, Hotchkin devised some revolutionary iron based turf dressings and fertilisers, hence the company name.

In his book *The Principles of Golf Architecture*, published in the early 1920s, he gives advice on all aspects of golf course design in detail, golf course construction, drainage on golf courses,

machinery required for their upkeep and maintenance procedures.

In the winter of 1927/1928, Hotchkin travelled to South Africa to become involved in the remodelling of Durban CC, and others, including Humewood CC at Port Elizabeth, Transvaal, Mowbray, Cape Province, East London, Maccauveli CC and Royal Port Alfred. He became well respected for these works. In fact, Abe Mitchell, the well-known golf professional (and incidentally the model for the golfer on top of the Ryder Cup trophy) regarded the thirteenth at Humewood and the fourth at East London as two of the best golf holes in the world. Both were long and well bunkered par fours, demanding accurately placed tee shots.

Hotchkin returned from South Africa in early 1928 and soon after, Hutchison and Sir Guy Campbell joined Ferigna. Hutchison had played golf competitively until serving in World War One. As a result of which, his game suffered and he then turned to golf course design. He worked as assistant to James Braid during the construction of Gleneagles before going on to assist Hotchkin at Woodhall Spa.

Campbell, a family friend, had previously worked as a sub editor of *The Times* under Bernard Darwin. Although a very competent golfer and well versed in all aspects of the game, his only previous design experience was in assisting Hutchison with a putting course at Hurlingham polo ground and with the reconstruction of Wimereux Links near Boulogne, France.

Ferigna undertook the design and construction of several courses in the south of England including Ashridge, Warsash, Shoreham, Leeds Castle, and West Sussex. Neither Warsash nor Shoreham now exist, although Ashridge is still regarded as one of the top courses in the south east of England. It is a hilly well bunkered course set in parkland and woodland.

West Sussex was the brainchild of Commander George Hillyard, a keen golfer. He lived in Bramfold, a house overlooking the attractive heath at Pulborough, and he could see the potential of the land as a golf course. Tom Simpson, who later made alterations to Ashridge, believed West Sussex should rank as 'the equal of any inland course in this or any other country'.





The Hotchkiss course at Woodhall Spa is regarded as one of the finest inland courses in the UK

The most likely influence on the design of West Sussex is Woodhall Spa. Their major similarity is the fact that they are both set in heathland, although in the case of the latter it is relatively flat, as opposed to the rolling and undulating character of the landscape at Pulborough. Both are designed in a loop of eighteen holes as opposed to two returning loops of nine. At Woodhall Spa this was due to the land being long and narrow and bisected by the railway, whereas at West Sussex there was probably enough land to have built a further eighteen holes, although some of the marshier portions would have made this impractical.

Woodhall Spa is a long and demanding course. The emphasis here is upon the golfer's ability to play a long and well placed drive off the tee, as the hazards consist of long carries over heather from the tee and strategically placed bunkers at the apex of doglegs or in close proximity to greens.

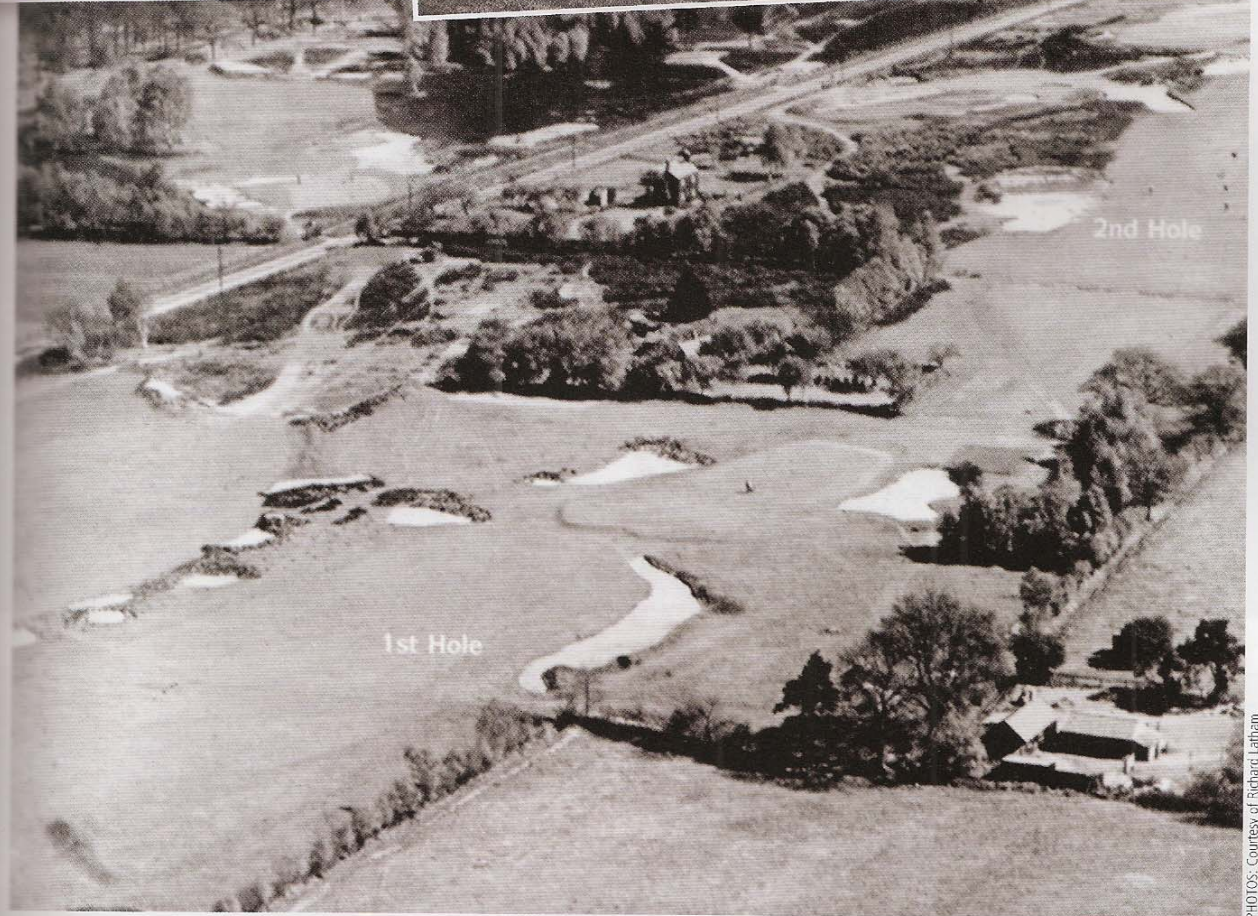
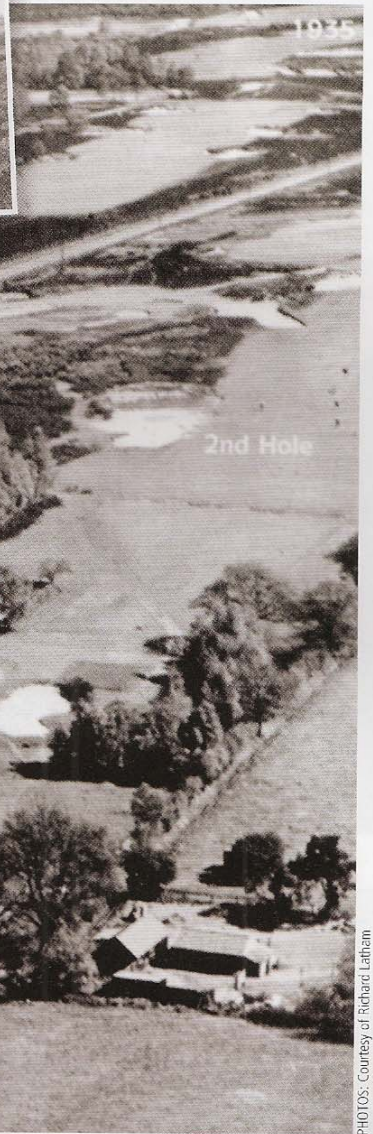
Although West Sussex is much shorter, it is just as challenging. The short holes are by no means straightforward either, most notably the famous 220 yard sixth, a formidable par three which plays across

a pond. The hole caused disagreement between Campbell and Hotchkiss. Hutchison agreed with Hotchkiss over the decision to change the original short par four into the par three it is today. This meant there were two one shot holes in

succession, but here it does not upset the balance of the first nine, because to most golfers, it plays more as a par four. The water features are naturally occurring bog and marsh, although the pond on the sixth was enlarged.



Deep pot bunkers await an errant shot off the 336 yard seventeenth at Woodhall Spa



Historic shots of the famous Hotchkin course at Woodhall Spa, with bunker depth illustrated thanks to an upturned car (inset left)!

PHOTOS: Courtesy of Richard Latham

Using hazards to force play over or around is synonymous with the design principles of Hotchkin, Campbell and Hutchison. In fact, Hotchkin said the best results are obtained by making a course conform to the natural surroundings that already exist, so that it will not look artificial and fail to blend with the landscape.

The second, seventh and sixteenth holes feature considerable carries to the fairway over deep pits, making the tee shots more intimidating. Prior to the Second World War, the back tee on the second hole was placed on the south side of the Pulborough/Storrington road. This meant the golfer had to play his shot over the sand pit which, incidentally, was used to supply the course's bunkers. This made the hole play very long – probably the most difficult par four on the course

– but it caused safety problems as the road became busier. Although the tee has been moved forward to the north side of the road, adjacent to the sand pit, it still

“Using hazards to force play over or around is synonymous with the design principles of Hotchkin, Campbell and Hutchison”

requires a great deal of skill with a well placed drive, as the approach shot to the small green has to be played over a deep and wide gully, which gives it the illusion

of being shorter than it actually is.

The seventh is an awesome par four hole of 442 yards, with a carry of about 180 yards over heather and scrub, set in which is a cavernous bunker. What makes it yet more difficult is the fact that it is a blind drive. Sadly, the original severity of this tee shot was somewhat lessened in 1933, due to the then captain of the club, LC Ducane. He had a grassy valley constructed to the left of the bunker for the benefit of elderly members and himself, who could not reach the fairway, later to be known as Ducane's Hollow.

At West Sussex, where, like Woodhall Spa, the sand is naturally occurring, the bunkering plays a major part in the balance of its architectural make up. At both courses the positioning of bunkers is well thought out, and it is this that prevents the golfer from ever

THE MORNING POST, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 1930.



SOMETHING NOVEL IN GOLF ARCHITECTURE—A 'short' hole (130 yds.) hangs on the side of a heathery knoll, rising like St. Michael's Mount in miniature out of a Sussex marsh—sketched from the teeing ground.



West Sussex's famous sixth hole was originally conceived as a short par four.

becoming complacent about the shot in hand. He has to play each hole as a strategic progression of shots. Each shot influences the way in which the next is played, and each, ultimately, is influenced by the bunkering. The bunkering design is the single most important factor affecting play of the course, with particular regard to its relationship to landing areas from tees, in the vicinity of dog legs, for example. It is the bunkering which is in control, and in some respects, the golfer has to conform to these circumstances by adapting his game accordingly. However, this does not prevent the good golfer from scoring well. The course is never simple, but it will always reward skilful golf.

It is difficult to ascertain how West Sussex was created, especially when three strong minded individuals were working together on the design. It was after this project that Ferigna ceased to exist as a partnership, due to disagreements over

certain aspects of design. It would also tend to suggest that there could well have been a clash of personalities.

Both Hotchkin and Hutchison had already made a name for themselves in the design and construction of golf

"Hotchkin believed that the setting of the green was of paramount importance and that it must blend with its surroundings"

courses prior to setting up in partnership with Campbell, and in particular, they had worked successfully together at Woodhall Spa. Only a limited amount has been written about Hutchison, although the work he was involved in at

courses other than those he worked on with Ferigna was all well respected. These included Tadmarton Heath, Pitlochry, Ganton, Royal West Norfolk (1928), Gleneagles (early 1920s with James Braid), Princes', Sandwich (1907 with P M Lucas and C Hutchings), and his most famous, Turnberry (1938, the Arran and Ailsa courses).

Hotchkin worked on numerous other golf courses as consultant in design, construction and maintenance matters. These included Grimsby, Newmarket, Parly Downs, RAF Cranwell, Stoke Rochford, Sutton on Sea, Newmarket Links, and remodelling works to Royal Worlington and Newmarket, regarded by many as the finest nine-hole course in the world.

The bunkering at West Sussex makes the course an excellent test of golf, in conjunction with other aspects, such as the orientation of tees to fairways and orientation of greens to doglegs, the undulating nature of the topography of

the site and orientation of holes to the prevailing wind.

Hotchkiss, with his widespread knowledge in the technical side of golf course construction and his experience in the design of links courses in South Africa, was the most likely man of the partnership to have had the most influence in the design of West Sussex. In his book, *The Principles of Golf Architecture*, he described the modern golf course architect as someone who possesses a large and varied knowledge of golf course construction, which embraces an understanding of greenkeeping, landscape gardening, the management and knowledge of labour conditions, all about clubhouses, the laying of water and an insight into 'how to save expenditure and reduce waste'. Above all, the best element is good practical knowledge combined with common sense.

Hotchkiss was a great admirer of links courses and he looked upon their construction as being merely a matter of making the best use of what was already provided. However, as in the case of some links courses, he disliked the layout to reach a point furthest from the clubhouse, and then to return. This was because he felt the golfer would not be sufficiently tested by the change in the direction of the wind. He believed the course should be designed in such a way as to allow the wind to influence the golfer in as many different ways as possible.

Regarding the layout of a golf course he

felt the landscape determined the type of course which could be built. If any sand dunes, sandy hollows, gravel pits, ponds or gorse exist on site, then they should be incorporated into the design of the course. On hilly land, the course should be made shorter, whereas on flat land, additional length could be planned for.

He identified that a larger proportion of golfers preferred a shorter course of reasonable length. Although he felt that it was quite impossible to design a course which would satisfy the requirements of the pure rabbit, the architect should endeavour to provide enjoyment for all types of golfer. The carry from tees should be fair and not over difficult so as to keep congestion on the course to a minimum; the par fours should be designed to allow the longer handicapper a relatively easy five; the par threes should be played from the same tees by all standards of golfer, yet the club selected to play the shot will differ accordingly. Hotchkiss regarded the proper balance of the holes on the course as a major aspect, and he suggests there should be four par threes, two of which should be at even holes, the other two at odd, and that the remainder should consist of eleven or twelve par fours and two or three par fives.

Hotchkiss suggests that the fairways of par four and five holes should be set at an angle from the tee, and the greater the angle, the greater the variety of shots and interest in playing the hole. Consequently, the golfer who places his drive in the most

advantageous position should get the fullest benefit for his second shot. The entrances to the greens of par three and par five holes should be narrow, whereas, for par four holes the entrance should become wider as the approach shot increases in length. Bunkering on a course is totally dependant on the characteristics of the particular site and on each hole. For example, in parkland the bunkers should be kept to a minimum and be feature bunkers only. In addition, grass bunkers could be used with good effect. He recommends that if a bunker is to be constructed, then it should be bold without any obviously artificial surrounds.

Hotchkiss believed that the setting of the green was of paramount importance and that it must blend with its surroundings in order to obtain the proper atmosphere. The way to accomplish this was to avoid cutting into the side of a hill and creating over steep banks at the back of greens. The best results could be achieved by appreciating what existed and working with it or enhancing it. He writes: "It is hoped that the construction of hideous and unnecessary mounds, built up tees and freak greens, usually entailing considerable cost, are a thing of the past." He recommended that greens should be based on a size of between 800-1000 square yards to prevent any concentrated wear and to allow a greater amount and variation of pin positions. **GCA**

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Random fairforms on Humewood's thirteenth prove that mother nature creates the most enduring challenges.