

# 18 HOLES WITH HAWTREE

## No. 15 — Transformation at St Andrews

by FRED HAWTREE

But not the St Andrews where the American visitor is supposed to have said, "Really a very good course for such a small town!" We are discussing San Andres de Llavaneras, a tiny nine holes on the coast about 20 miles north of Barcelona. The club started in the twenties and Peter Gannon, an English amateur who designed some golf courses abroad in the twenties, helped to lay it out. He did not have very much help from the ground. There were only 30-odd acres on the side of a steep hill and they produced about 2,500 yards with two holes crossing and the player in mortal danger throughout the round.

In 1967, while involved in the new course at Pals, further to the north of the Costa Brava (the Spanish Open Amateur Championship was held there last September), I looked in at Llavaneras hoping to see what grass they used. But the situation was far from clear.

Then in February 1968, a telegram came, "Would I meet Sênor Villalonga at a hotel in London?" We met and he unfolded a plan. It could only be Llavaneras. Honesty obliged me to say that fundamental improvement was out of the question here on a course in play but being younger in those days and brightening at a mention of extra land, I arranged a visit. Unfortunately, it had to be on a Sunday. With virtually no rough, and players everywhere, an inspection of the layout was perilous and the extra land was not much help.

One piece was like the dome of St Pauls and detached. The other was a 3-acre triangle alongside the 8th which already received a good share of golf balls sliced off the side of the hill at that hole or hooked from the 7th which occupied roughly the same area.

I took my plans to the clubhouse but the accommodation emphasised the social rather than the administrative side of club life and, like the course, offered no retreat for the golf architect. As a result, every member became in-

involved in designing the alterations. Of these, the most popular was a par-5 which ran from one end of the course to the other and looked like being the longest hole in Catalonia.

After several aperitivos, lunch did nothing to relieve a growing somnolence induced by heat, travel, repetitive discussions in a foreign tongue and the dry white wine of nearby Alella. A Committee Meeting was arranged for the evening and it was clearly undesirable to fall asleep while that was going on. I, therefore, made a further inspection of the layout, this time seeking a quiet corner for a siesta. There was still no such place. Every inch of the course was in play. But a vacant lot behind the clubhouse was big enough to provide a quick ziz out of sight. One does not approve of going to sleep on the job but sometimes there is no alternative.

Committee Meetings in Spain are not based on an agenda (and I regret to note an increasing tendency towards the resulting general discussion in this country). But the central topic was clear and the proposals even clearer after the unofficial run-through in the morning. I explained that four changes would enable the 2nd hole to play behind the 1st green instead of across the approach and also allow the 7th and 8th to have separate fairways. It would even enable the 9th green to be moved as the clubhouse extensions planned looked like finishing in its left-hand wing bunker.

Sênor Bernades, the President, turned to Sênor Villalonga. "Carta blanca" he said, which I took to be some kind of document. Villalonga left the room and we continued to discuss details of the layout.

Three-quarters of an hour later he returned, rather glassy-eyed I thought, and sat down. "I've bought it" he said. He had visited the proprietor of the triangle by the 8th, taken a few glasses, agreed the price for the land,

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arranged terms of payment, so much down—so much over three years and clinched the deal. This I felt was the way to move. A typewriter was then brought in, a solicitor started to dictate and the formal papers were ready by 9 p.m.

No work was to be done until competitions finished at the end of September. But in July, there was a telephone call. "We have decided to close the course during alterations. You can now do what you like." These instructions are so rare that I took them literally and prepared plans, profiles and sections for recontouring every hole to remove freakish slopes. This involved cutting 16 feet deep at some points.

On the 1st October I went out, set out the pegs and offered to return when they started work. On the 14th October, another telegram. "Please come on 21st". This was in line with Llavaneras traditions. Three weeks from setting out to starting work is very reasonable. In the event, they were roughly a quarter of the way through the bulk excavations and top-soil had been stripped from most of the course and all was exactly in accordance with the plans. This is not a common occurrence on golf courses. But *Sênor Fradera*, a leading Committee Member, had engaged a "*paregador*" who is rather better than a clerk of works.

The soil has a beautiful texture from decomposed granite and large reserves appeared at a depth free of weed seed. These were suitably distributed and planting started in December. A certain *Sênor Mas* has large nurseries of an

Agrostic *Stolonifera* strain at Llavaneras. Stolons were spread liberally over the ground and then rolled with vertical discs which pushed them into the surface. In January 1969, some of the stolons already had an inch or more of root and by April, all was green.

The Members meanwhile had been distributed round neighbouring courses—San Cugat, Pals, Costa Brava and El Prat—but they reassembled at Christmas to see how the works were progressing. A route was signposted all round the course and they were organised into foursomes, each in a car, and were sent off from the first tee at intervals by the starter to drive the nine holes.

February to April is a good season for grass growth in that climate but the opening was delayed until the 1st July. By this time there was a uniform turf everywhere with no weed and no rogue grasses. A reservoir had been made for full watering, a new car park had been squeezed out of an odd corner, full size palm and pine trees had been planted at strategic points, and the size of the clubhouse had been trebled with putting green, new terraces and approach—a busy nine months.

At first they thought the new course was too easy. But when the memories of the old course had faded, the problems of golf itself took charge and in a recent professional competition, there were only two rounds one below par.

I have tried to think why a lot of courses in Britain do not undertake a transformation of this sort. It is more difficult in a colder country with congested courses but the real answer is probably more simple. Money!

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Selkirk Golf Club's plans to extend their nine holes to 18 have met local opposition. Nearly 1,000 people have signed a petition opposing the plan which takes in part of a local beauty spot.

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Aberdeen is looking ahead to an expansion of golf facilities. It already has three 18-hole courses and is planning a new 18 and two new nine's at Hazlehead and Balnagask.

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Kenilworth Golf Club has been lucky in proposals for a new by-pass road. The plans remove exactly 34 square yards in one corner of the course.