

KINGS CHURCH GOLF DAY – SATURDAY 8th OCTOBER

Eleven golfers with varying abilities (and excuses) turned up for the last Kings Church Golf Day of 2005 at Blue Mountain Golf Club. The returning Glenn Hanton tried a crafty ten minutes on the driving range to re-acquaint himself with which end of the club to hold, and promptly rendered himself off gardening duty for a fortnight with severely blistered hands! Michael Goodwin, shorts and all, had dashed hotfoot from Heathrow, direct from a brief 24-hour trip to the USA. He had had no preparation at all for a tournament of such importance and got all his excuses in early – this didn't stop him from tucking into the coffee and bacon sandwiches, probably a relief after breakfast on the plane.

After a few last-minute amendments to the running order caused by Andy Pettit's football injury (I know, at his age!), the Brookside contingent got us off to a prompt start. Yours truly was actually a bit too prompt on the 206-yard 4th, not realising the wind was behind the tee and not expecting to reach the green at all, let alone rolling to about twenty feet from the pin while Jim Adkins and Glenn still had to putt – sorry chaps! By this stage, Stuart Burgess had set the pace in our group, starting par-birdie-birdie despite playing Graham Stewart's ball on the third fairway (I'm sure it was a much better lie). At the fourth, however, Stuart found his first water-trap of the afternoon, thus setting a trend he was to follow with three further visits to the lakes and ponds of Binfield during the day – as Graham noted, it must have been those hydrophilic balls he bought last week.

The usual practice at Blue Mountain is to hold the Nearest the Pin competition at the 11th, but as everyone complains every time about how hard it is to hit that green, we shifted it to the par-4 5th hole, giving everyone two shots to reach the green. Sure enough, only two players hit the green in two shots (about 350 yards from the tee), so newcomer Michael Doe didn't have a lot of competition in walking away with the first prize of the day. Mr Goodwin was still running on adrenalin from his plane journey, as his approach sailed high over the flag and into the trees beyond the green – either that or BA are putting too much spinach in their breakfasts.

The eighth is always fun at Blue Mountain, and didn't disappoint again as the greenside lake swallowed up its usual quota of golf balls – I certainly saw John Hicklin and Graham Stewart in there at least once. In contrast, I think this was the only pond Stuart Burgess avoided all day, pitching his second shot to three feet – I believe Glenn had done the same ten minutes earlier as both recorded very rare five-point holes. In contrast, two minutes later, your correspondent pulled his tee-shot on the ninth into the lake in front of the sixteenth green, thereby losing a ball that had stood him in good stead for the last five rounds. The ninth also saw Graham hole a 25-foot putt for a superb birdie as he finished the front nine with his best haul of the summer. Like his playing partners, he couldn't keep this up and faded towards the end of the round, especially after the rain set in for the last few holes.

Gossip around the tenth tee was that the scoring was pretty high, a few having already reached 20 points for the round – clearly the KCGS standard is rising and lack of practice or God-given ability is no handicap. On to the ever-unpopular eleventh, as stated earlier NOT the scene of the Nearest the Pin prize. Sure enough, quite a few of us, myself included, hit the green - but not Michael Goodwin. With the spinach clearly still in his bloodstream, Michael proceeded to blast his tee shot way, way past the green, the ball finally coming to rest sixty yards down the twelfth fairway – as Stuart pointed out, he played his second shot from as far from the flag as he'd played his first, just in a totally different direction. He still got his par, though – that's one way to do it!

The skies were noticeably darkening, and a few tried to speed things along at this point – Graham's solution was to pick his ball up on more holes as his earlier accuracy faded. He did manage net pars at 13 and 14, the latter especially noteworthy as it's very long for a par three and was into a strong, damp wind as we stood on the tee. At the next, the long fifteenth, Graham was one of only two players to hit the fairway – and this was the scene of the Longest Drive test. Glenn set an early mark, dead centre but only just over 120 yards. His playing partners all flew past him but lacked his accuracy. Of the following threeball, only Graham stayed on the short stuff, while in the final group our be-shortened friend performed his John Daly impression again and smashed his ball out of sight. But it was at least a yard off the fairway, and Glenn made off with the long-hitters prize (it's not often I get to write that!).

Thereafter, it was downhill all the way to the clubhouse as the threatened rain set in. Stuart holed a long putt on the 16th green for a birdie, and all three of our group hit the fairway off the 18th tee. Actually, we hit three different fairways! I went first and bounced a half-decent 1-iron off the wrong side of a bank onto the

17th fairway, Stuart pulled badly and found the middle of the 10th fairway (remarkably close to where he'd been on that hole an hour or so earlier). Only Graham found the correct fairway and managed to salvage a point from the final hole, and we paid the price for our poor last few holes as none of our trio ended up in the prizes in the post-match totting-up process.

In a bar packed with football spectators trying desperately to stay awake while watching England v Austria, the scorecards were assembled, assessed and added up. It was no surprise to anybody when it dawned that the person who'd made his excuses and left (as he'd come straight from the airport, had hardly slept and needed to get home urgently) had won by a country mile. Evidently Michael should make 24-hour trips across the pond just before rounds of golf on a regular basis if this is what it does for his game – a net score of 77 and 43 points to show for his day's work secured the Champion's Cup for a winter in the Goodwin trophy cabinet. Jim Adkins survived the shock of trying putt on the fourth green while my ball trundled past his feet to claim second place amongst the proper golfers, while the formidable Dry / Payne partnership cleaned up the prizes in the hackers' group.

After a couple of swift halves as we commiserated with David Beckham on his red card and Glenn Hanton on his red fingers, we had a short break before a number of us reconvened for dinner. Six wives joined us for a very pleasant meal - thankfully Henry VIII couldn't make it. The highlight was not my speech, but as many roast potatoes as you could eat and some very palatable chocolate torte – I will at least take credit for choosing the menu. Michael won yet another prize, this time as our most improved player of the season, his Society handicap having fallen from 18 back in April to 12 after today's efforts – he'll be a good player once he's caught up on his sleep! Patrick Hopkinson was named the Society's Champion Golfer of the Year for the second year in row – unfortunately for Patrick and Charlie, there's no trophy for him to keep next year if he makes it a hat-trick. A total of 22 golfers have played on our society days this year, slightly down on previous years, but we have only had four golf days for a variety of reasons. We parted on Saturday evening agreed that it had been another very good year for the Kings Church Golf Society, that we would set out to attract even more participants next summer – and that we need to find Mr Goodwin a new job that keeps him at home more.

Final scores:

Low handicappers:

- M Goodwin 43pts
- J Adkins 35
- M Doe 34
- S Olney 30

High handicappers:

- R Dry 36
- D Payne 35
- S Burgess 34
- J Hicklin 33
- P Trott 32
- G Hanton 29
- G Stewart 15

Nearest the Pin in Two: M Doe
 Longest Drive: G Hanton

Season's Awards:

KCGS Champion Golfer of the Year: Patrick Hopkinson
 Longest Driver: Jeff Dever
 Nearest the Pin Champion: Patrick Hopkinson
 Most Improved Golfer: Michael Goodwin
 Best High-Handicap Golfer: David Payne