

The Suffolk / Essex Tour

April 29th/May 1st 2025

April 29th 2025 – Thorpeness Golf Club

A small but perfectly formed turnout of 8 JBGS members arrived at Thorpeness Golf Club on Tuesday morning to be welcomed with glorious warm sunshine.

The society gathered in the club's patio and took the opportunity to catch up with fellow members who had not been seen since the Autumn Meeting in North Wales the previous September.

All member's reported fit and raring to go other than Past Captain Peter Sanbrook who was still recovering from knee surgery and acted as our roving reporter / photographer for the duration of the trip.

Due to the odd number of playing members (7) a stableford was the format competition with the captain playing in a 4 ball with Mark Horner, Steve Jones and Angela Grant for the front nine holes before dropping back to play with Tony Gill, Paul Melding and Alison Stanbrook on the back nine holes.

The history of the club regarding Braid can be summarised as follows:

James Braid visited site proposed for Thorpeness GC course, in the spring of 1922 and initially a nine-hole course was planned to open that August. In fact, 10 holes were laid out and opened in July. The other 8 holes were ready by the spring of 1923, one being added on the clubhouse side of the road, the other seven beyond Thorpeness Halt. Compared with today's course, the first nine are virtually the same, a pond being inserted on the 7th, as are four holes on the second nine, today's 12th, 13th, 16th, and 17th were originally numbered 10,11,14 and 15. Two more holes were inserted after the 9th, two more holes after 13th, old 11th, which meant one less crossing of the road which is busier now.

The old 12th & 13th disappeared and the round finished at the old 15th now the 17th and the strong par 4 18th.

Par is 69 and severe. There were and are seven par 4's over 400 yards and is a demanding course in other ways undulations both gentle and severe, sloping greens, some punitive bunkers and a superabundance of trees and heather, a classic heathland course.

The layout was found to be excellent by the membership, even though overall condition was not quite there, due probably to it being early season.

The competition itself was keenly contested, with Alison Stanbrook taking the spoils with a fine 32 points. The captain finished a credible 2nd with 31 points, with the rest of the field not far behind.

Members, sat down for a very enjoyable meal in the club restaurant following the day's play and looked forward to the 2nd days golf at Ipswich Golf Club (Purdis Heath).

April 30th 2025 – Ipswich Golf Club

For the 2nd day of the Suffolk Tour, we made our way across to Ipswich Golf Club.

On arrival at the club, we were welcomed with a fine and sunny day and a course which was in pristine condition.

Once again, stableford was the chosen format of the day, but playing numbers were reduced to 6 as Alison Stanbrook was resting due to her recovery from recent hip surgery and to give the rest of the field a chance.

The history of the club regarding Braid can be summarised as follows:

Ipswich Golf Club began in 1895 on a course at Rushmere Heath, to which Braid made alterations in 1929. In the early 1920's a move was considered desirable and Braid was asked to visit the proposed site and submit a plan.

He visited Black Heath as the area was known on 26th February 1925, and stayed overnight as a guest of a member. To avoid confusion with the Royal Blackheath club, it was decided to adopt the name Purdis Heath, that being the name of a farm in the vicinity. The site includes two decoy ponds into which wildfowlers lured ducks for the London Markets.

Braid originally wanted to direct 4 holes across the ponds, but because of boundary changes a different plan was adopted, routing the course in a horseshoe shape around the ponds.

At the time Braid estimated the course could be constructed for a maximum of £4000.

Unfortunately, Braid's map has been lost. He had not encroached on Bixley Heath as originally planned, and a strip of land on which he had marked a green was purchased.

He was recalled in 1926 because of alterations to the boundaries, which meant it was no longer possible to play across the ponds. The committee were then able to proceed with the construction of the course.

Hawtree and Taylor were the contractors and had to be recalled in 1929 when Mr. Hawtree was distressed with the condition of the tees. It was soon realised that these were too small for the amount of traffic on the course and the problem was rectified.

Some of the more fearsome bunkers have been replaced and the modern course is 35 yards shorter than the original. Tree cover has increased over the years, inside the horseshoe and around the perimeter.

Sir Henry Cotton who joined Braid, Taylor and Abe Mitchell at the opening exhibition match in 1928, held the course in high regard, and recalls Mitchell driving the 308-yard 9th green with a hickory club and a Silver King ball.

“This course can be truly regarded as one of Braid’s masterpieces, requiring accurate shot-making in a tree lined haven of tranquillity.”

It is fair to say that Purdis Heath fully met and went beyond each members expectations.

For the time of year, the course was in fantastic condition and as a layout, it is fair to say that it took each members breath away!

As for the competition, it was great to see our Honorary Secretary Tony Gill back in the winner’s circle, following his recent injury problems. Tony scored an excellent 34 points over such a stern test of golf, with Angela Grant coming in as runner up with a very credible 31 points.

Following the day’s golf, the society members met up for a meal and some drinks to reflect on the day’s play, discuss the format of the final day’s play along with other topics wide and varied!

May 1st 2025 – Colchester Golf Club

For our final day’s play, we travelled the short distance across the county border into Essex to visit Colchester Golf Club. Once again, we were blessed with perfect weather.

We were joined on the day by society stalwart Malcolm Harris and welcomed new member Vince Nichols. This boosted our playing numbers to 9.

As decided the previous evening, the format for the day was to be teams of 3, with the two best stableford scores from three counting on each hole.

The visit to Colchester Golf Club, was particularly poignant for Peter Stanbrook, who was a past member of the club and by surveying the winner’s boards in the clubhouse, it had been a successful membership!

The history of the club regarding Braid can be summarised as follows:

On 1st July 1907 Colchester Golf Course opened its 18-hole course, 5,923 yards in length. It was played in this form for a year and 4 months but was obviously problematic, in too tight an area for 18 and Braid was called in to pronounce on it. He was of the view that it was unsuitable for a full course when he visited probably in the spring of 1908.

The club has a copy of Braid’s nine-hole layout, which utilises the land with imagination, creating far more interesting holes. Eight of these nine holes still exist, apart from some marginal changes. None of the original 18 holes was kept.

On Thursday 14th July 1910, Braid was back, fresh from his fifth Open win, to play an exhibition with Taylor, formally opening the course.

In 1935 Braid was back again, to help plan the extension to eighteen holes which had been drawn up by S. Parmenter, the professional, more land being available, and in May 1938 a formal opening took place, consisting of a 36-hole medal for Essex and Suffolk professionals.

The course is substantially as Braid and Parmenter left it.

Regarding the day's play, the course was found to be in excellent condition and was an interesting yet fair test of golf.

Winning team on the final day were the Captain, Tony Gill and Malcolm Harris with 79 points and the runners up position going to the team of Mark Horner, Steve Jones and Angela Grant with 76 points.

Following the conclusion of play, the society members enjoyed the sunshine, along with drinks and sandwiches on the club patio.

The captain made the presentation of prizes for the past three days competition, along with welcome gifts to Vince Nichols as our new member.

The captain went on to thank everyone for their attendance over the past 3 days, wished everyone a safe trip home and looked forward to seeing as many members of the society as possible at the Highland Meeting in June.

Summary:

Although the society numbers were low, this was a very successful trip, that was blessed with fantastic weather and great golf courses in a corner of the country we had never previously visited. Once again, a heartfelt thank you goes to all the JBGS members who attended.

Special mention must go to Angela Grant and Tony Gill, who made the long journey from Brora. Also, a big thanks to Peter and Alison Stanbrook, who travelled from Farnham, Malcolm Harris, and Vince Nichols and finally, the Welsh contingent of Paul Melding, Mark Horner, and Steve Jones.

Thank you everyone, without your support the society would cease to exist!

We now move onto the Highland Tour in June where I hope to see as many members as possible.