

The Shropshire Tour

September 10th/12th 2025

September 10th 2025 – Hawkstone Park GC (Hawkstone Course)

A healthy turnout of 14 JBGS members arrived at Hawkstone Park Golf Club on Wednesday morning for a society individual/team stableford to kick off the Shropshire tour.

Play was over the Hawkstone course which James Braid redesigned. The original course was opened on the 1st May 1920, the owner apparently laying out the holes, with a retired local farmer playing a major role. It was a nine-hole course, and the other person who apparently had a hand in its layout was the first professional, Bert Sheppard. The second nine followed very quickly. In 1925 a change of ownership and a breaking up of the 1000-acre estate took place.

In 1930, the professional was relieved of his greenkeeping duties, and Braid was approached for advice.

No doubt his report was as detailed as ever, but only some recommendations were implemented over the next 10 years. It seemed he straightened the 2nd, angled the 6th, designed a new 9th and 10th, straightened the 11th designed a new par 3 12th, removed the old par 3 16th and, true to form almost certainly bunkered the whole course with fearsome greenside bunkers. The fairway bunkers, too, have high fronts, and once in one, the player can only hope to get onto the fairway without further damage to his score.

Slopes condition many holes and a promising drive may well find the rough rather than the fairway. Ridges cross some fairways, such as the 2nd, so positioning of the tee shot is vital.

Today's Hawkstone course is virtually the same as it was when Braid's changes had been implemented. Did he really recommend more radical surgery?

Golfer's may criticise the course for the number of blind shots, but this is inevitable on land which undulates quite severely in places, adding spice to the enjoyment.

The blind shots do not detract from the shot making values imposed by Braid and coupled with the majesty of the setting, remind the golfer that the game is designed for exercise and enjoyment in equal measure.

Regarding the team format for the day's play, due to the number of players, there were 2 x teams of 4 players and 2 x teams of 3 players. There was therefore, an agreement, that Angela Grant and Alison Stanbrook would drop back from their respective 4 ball groups to the 3 ball groups behind after 9 holes. The format of the team match was aggregate stableford with all scores to count.

Conditions for the day were tricky with occasional showers and the aforementioned blind shots to deal with. The condition of the course was generally good, other than the fairways which had suffered from a long dry summer, and meant that preferred lies were in play. None of this detracted from a very interesting course which looked and played even better when the rain stopped and the sun came out.

From a competition perspective, Robert Arbourne won the individual competition with a fine 39 points, while the team prize went to Alison Stanbrook, Tony Gill, Robert Arbourne, and the Captain.

Following the golf, good food and good company were enjoyed by the JBGS members at the Hawkstone Park Hotel in preparation for the match v Hawkstone Park GC the following day.

September 11th 2025 – Hawkstone Park GC (Championship Course)

Following a good night's sleep and hearty breakfast, the JBGS members were refreshed and ready for their match v Hawkstone Park GC on the Championship Course.

The morning brought some very heavy showers to the course and the start of the match was delayed by 20 minutes to allow the worst of the weather to pass through.

The Championship Course at Hawkstone Park was designed by Brian Huggett, opened in 1995, and originally called the "Windmill Course".

The difference between the Hawkstone and the Championship courses is quite contrasting. While the Hawkstone course utilises the natural contours of land, and can be quite tight in places, the Championship course offers a more open feel and provides a fun challenge with its use of water and varied features.

Regarding the match itself, to balance numbers, JBGS member Steve Lawson played for the opposition, while squad rotation meant that Peter Stanbrook was rested for the fixture.

Going into the fixture, the JBGS Captain was unusually worried, following the unexpected and disturbing wins against Fortrose & Rosemarkie GC and Royal Dornoch GC at the recent Founding Meeting in June. However, as matches came to their conclusion, the Captain was relieved to report to the JBGS and Hawkstone Park GC members that Hawkstone Park GC had been victorious by a comfortable 4-2 margin.

Following the post-match meal in the clubhouse, the JBGS Captain thanked Mr. Ken MacGillivray (Hawkstone Park GC Captain) for agreeing to the match and to JBGS member Steve Lawson for coordinating the visit. Both were presented with wine glasses while Hawkstone Park GC team members each received a tot glass along with the proceeds from the bunnet collection for their junior section, as a memento of the day.

With the formalities of the day concluded, the JBGS members moved cross-country and relocated in Oswestry, in preparation for the final match of the tour against Oswestry GC the following day.

September 12th 2025 – Oswestry Golf Club

For the final day of the Shropshire Tour, we arrived at Oswestry Golf Club for a mid-morning tee time.

Oswestry Golf Club was originally sited at Llanymynech but because of a lease crisis, decided to move to Aston Park, nearer to the South East of the town.

Braid was invited to lay out an eighteen-hole course and visited the site on the 23rd and 24th of January 1929. Prompt as ever, his plans were in the post within a week.

His map was also included, but I understand the club is still hunting for it. Play began in June 1931. The course measured 6040 yards and apart from moving the 2nd tee, is virtually unchanged in yardage and layout, as confirmed by the club's 1950's handbook and today's card. Braid could return and immediately be home, viewing his course and the Welsh hills in the distance.

Our numbers for the day were back up to our full quota of 14, as we arrived to a warm welcome from the Oswestry members.

Following introductions to our opponents we gathered around the 1st tee in anticipation of a close match against our opponents.

Format for the day was better ball stableford so that each match was guaranteed to play the full 18 holes.

Regarding the weather, it was nice to tee off in sunshine albeit we encountered the odd shower during our rounds, but overall, the day and the occasion was very pleasant.

The course itself was in good condition with the back nine a good test of skill.

On completion of each match, the participants enjoyed lively conversation over lunch in the clubhouse before the formalities began with the Oswestry GC Captain welcoming the JBGS to the club.

In response, the JBGS Captain thanked the club for agreeing to the fixture and congratulated Oswestry Golf Club on a convincing 6.5 – 0.5 points victory.

The day concluded with the presentation to the Oswestry Golf Club team members of tot glasses and the proceeds from the bunnet collection for their junior section.

After saying our goodbyes to everyone, The JBGS set off in their respective directions to make their way home with another regional tour successfully completed!

Summary:

While we encountered rain on all 3 days, overall, we were lucky and the weather did not detract from another successful trip. Once again, a heartfelt thank you goes to all the JBGS members who attended.

Special mention must go to Angela Grant, Tony Gill, Steve and Alison Darlington, Alistair Fraser, Alistair Picken and Martin Baird who made the long journey from across Scotland. Also, a big thanks to Peter and Alison Stanbrook, who travelled from Farnham. Last but not least, the Welsh contingent of Mark Horner, Steve Jones, and Robert Arbourne.

A big thank you must go to Steve Lawson, who came up with the idea and did a lot of the coordination for this event. This took a sizeable weight load off the JBGS committee – thank you Steve.

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

We now move into the close season where the committee will be busy arranging and finalising the fixtures for 2026.

I look forward to seeing everyone soon.

Regards,

Barrie.