**Bournemouth Amateur Golf Weeks in the 1930s**

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***examines the impact of these events in drawing visiting golfers to the town and analyses the demographics of the participants***

*Introduction*

There were multiple factors that motivated local corporations to invest resources into the development of public municipal golf courses. However, for the seaside towns this included meeting the corporation’s objective of providing new and popular amenities that attracted new segments of tourists into the resorts. Consequently, the first municipal course in England was laid out at Meyrick Park in Bournemouth in 1894. The hosting of Bournemouth’s Amateur Golf Weeks demonstrates how they increased demand for and further broadened the nature of golfing participation, for locals and visitors alike, by helping to break down the traditional social and cultural barriers associated with the game. In comparison, in Scotland, while the majority of golf courses at the turn of the century were private members clubs, there was a greater propensity in the provision of pay and play municipal courses. A contemporary account, identified that, in Scotland, municipal golf enterprises were commonplace, but only a few rare exceptions were found in England.[[1]](#endnote-1) While these were popular with the local golfers, they also attracted considerable numbers of golfing tourists who journeyed to play. These golfing tourists would stay in the local hotels and spend money in the resort during their visit contributing to the local economy, thus justifying the corporation’s financial investment. To achieve this review, an analysis of the participants in the men’s section of the Bournemouth Amateur Open Golf Tournaments from 1936 - 1939 was undertaken. The records for these four years revealed the magnitude and the countrywide origins of the golfing tourists. A socio-economic analysis of the occupation, class and the age of the visiting players identify they were broadly representative of the typical 1930s club golfer. However, some advances in terms of class and gender participation were present amongst the golf tourists who visited Bournemouth.

At Meyrick Park, the Bournemouth Corporation recognised the benefits of these competitions from the beginning when the Town Mayor announced, before the course was even opened, that he would present a silver cup, the ‘Russell-Cotes Challenge Cup’, to be played for annually.[[2]](#endnote-2) The Council minutes subsequently show that a summer meeting was held on the 18th - 20th of June 1895. The committee agreed to spend a total of £60 on prizes with £10 awarded to the winner of the Challenge Cup. Advertisements for the competition were inserted in the national periodical *Golf* for the three months before the event. This was rewarded with 26 entrants in the first year, and the inaugural winner of the Challenge Cup was a Mr A.C. Young.[[3]](#endnote-3) In addition to the Challenge Cup, the competition notice provides a further sign of the early recognition of inclusiveness, and the widening of participation, with evidence of a ladies event. This was free to enter and open to members of all golf clubs, with a first prize offered as £5.[[4]](#endnote-4) The *Bournemouth Guardian* records that two women tied on 66, and so a play-off was required to declare a Miss Fryer as the victor. However, the loser, Mrs Young, had the consolation prize of winning the handicap competition.[[5]](#endnote-5) The following year, the Corporation continued to organise the event, again advertising it in *Golf* magazine before holding the second annual golf meeting on 2nd - 5th of May 1896. This time, thirteen players competed for the Russell Coates Challenge Cup and a further 38 for a second trophy, the Leven Challenge Cup. The Earl of Leven and Melville presented this trophy, but under the condition that it was restricted to amateurs from Hampshire, Wiltshire and Dorset. The entrance fee for both men’s events was 2*s*. 6*d*., but the prize money was reduced to £5. The ladies event retained the first prize of £5, but still no fee was required to enter this competition.[[6]](#endnote-6) By 1903 the event was being organised by the Meyrick Park GC as part of their Spring Meeting, and in 1909 it was being played at the Queen’s Park course and hosted by the Meyrick Park and Queen’s Park Club. This club was formed in 1905 when the latter, the second municipal course in the town, was established and this allowed members and visitors to play on both courses. According to the notice in the *Bournemouth Evening Echo,* the rules for entering the Leven Cup were unchanged and open to members from golf clubs in Dorset, Hampshire and Wiltshire. Thus it still encouraged visiting golfers to Bournemouth to compete against the local members on the town’s municipal courses.[[7]](#endnote-7)

By the 1930s these events had expanded but were once again being promoted by Bournemouth Corporation. They now constituted the ‘Bournemouth Golfing Week’ and the Bournemouth Amateur Open Golf Tournament was held in 1932 from 5th - 14th of May with competitions advertised for men and women with events held on the town’s two municipal courses. The number of events had expanded to five events for women over three days and seven for men over the following five days with matches organised for single and pairs competitions.[[8]](#endnote-8) Interestingly, the prize money had not advanced since the 1890s, with £5 5*s*. being the largest prize on offer, but the winners were also presented with replica cups. Significantly, local hotels and Trade Organisations presented a number of the new cups and suggests that the local establishments were not only keen to be associated with the Golfing Week, but they saw the direct marketing opportunities it offered. Newspaper accounts of the week’s events provide evidence that many visiting golfers were present, and some were victorious. Under the title ‘Municipal Golf,’ the *Bournemouth Evening Echo* stated, ‘Chamber of Trade Cup Goes to a Visitor’, and identifies that a Miss J. Lashmore, from Rothley Park GC, Leicester, beat a field of sixty entrants. Further proof is shown at the prize-giving when the Mayor congratulated the victorious women and expressed the hope that the numerous competitors, especially the visitors, had been pleased with the condition of the links.[[9]](#endnote-9) The popularity of the Golfing Week is demonstrated by how in 1932 it attracted a total of 413 participants, up from 306 in the inaugural event in 1931.[[10]](#endnote-10) The broader motives, beyond simply sporting competition for hosting this tournament were also apparent within the programme’s text, which styled Bournemouth as an ideal golfing holiday destination.

‘Bournemouth has 1000 acres of parks and gardens and unrivalled entertainment. Book the dates and spend a golfing holiday amidst [the] charming surroundings. The Manager will be delighted to send you the Bournemouth guidebook and hotel list and to assist prospective visitors to the tournaments to secure hotel accommodation.’[[11]](#endnote-11)

*The 1936 - 1939 Bournemouth Open Amateur Golf Tournaments*

The event continued to hold an essential place in the town’s sporting calendar in the closing years of the 1930s, attracting over a thousand entrants in the period 1936 - 1939. The register, for the Men’s Meeting has been preserved in the archives of the Bournemouth Golf Alliance, it includes the full alphabetical list of entrants by year, their home address, parent golf club, handicap, which of the seven golf competitions they entered and the entry fees paid.[[12]](#endnote-12) Regrettably, the similar records for the ladies’ competitions covering their four events have not survived to enable a comparison study to be undertaken.

In addition to the register of entries, the programme for the Ninth Open Amateur Tournament provided further evidence to illustrate the size of the event and its great importance to the town of Bournemouth, the courses, hotels and businesses that sought to benefit from the annual golf tournament. The Ninth Open Amateur Tournament was played in 1939 on 26th - 27th of May for ladies and across the 8th - 13th of May for men.

( *Insert image of 1939 Bournemouth Open Programme near here)*

As can be seen from the dates, the events were held across different weeks and thus increased the period when the competing golfers were visiting the town, and so would benefit the hotels and businesses catering for them over this extended timeframe. To promote the tournament, the Borough produced a 32 page brochure, which included all the necessary golf-related information: details of the various competitions being staged, entry fees, rules, the prize money on offer and maps of the courses and the town.

*(Insert image of Locations of Bournemouth Golf Courses near here)*

Entry forms for the various ladies’ and men’s competitions were included employing two ‘tear-out’ forms that entrants were required to complete and send, together with appropriate fees, to the Honorary Secretary of the Bournemouth Golf Tournament at the Town Hall, Bournemouth. Complementing these details, there was copious information provided for the visiting golfer and any accompanying family members. This included a list of local hotels, that were often described as being ‘ideal for golfers,’ adverts for local department stores and full-page features on both municipal courses’ golf professional. There was also a directory of Sports and Games in Bournemouth and a schedule the year’s ‘Coming (Arts and Sports) Events’. Finally, the Southern Railway’s *Golf in the South* was also promoted at the cost of 1*s*. to stimulate further the interest for the roving golfer who might be keen to explore further courses within the region over the summer.

The format of the seven men’s competitions comprised of a mix of singles, pairs and one mixed event. Local organisations sponsored two of the events which were: the Rotary Club, the Licensed Hotels and Restaurants Association and a third, the main event of the meeting, was the County Borough of Bournemouth Challenge Cups [one for the Scratch score and the other for the best handicap score]. The winners of all three of these competitions received a replica cup as their prize, the runners-up and winners of the other four events won cash prizes, (*Table 1*). In 1939 the total prize money presented was £55 13*s*. In contrast, the income in entry fees for the same year was only £13 13*s*. 6*d*. this shows that even with the support of the local organisations the Borough was prepared to finance the cost of the week, recognising the significantly higher return they would enjoy on this relatively modest investment.

*(Insert Table 1: The 1939 Prize Money, Fees and Income near here)*

When determining who could be considered a tourist, there is a lack of one definitive method that can be used. Inglis viewed that ‘holidays are somewhere you go away to’[[13]](#endnote-13) but this is rather vague. More helpful, was the analysis of the 1936 Bournemouth Amateur Open that was presented by Major T.V. Rebbeck, Chair of the Tournaments Committee.[[14]](#endnote-14) He separated the entrants into those from Bournemouth clubs (local), neighbouring clubs from Hampshire, Wiltshire and Dorset (region) and visitors (distant) and so validating the adoption of a three-level methodology for determining the geographical origin of the competitors for the 1936 - 1939 tournaments.

As discussed above, the data for this study was drawn from the entry register for the Men’s Bournemouth Open Amateur Golf Tournament and specifically the years 1936 - 1939 (*Table 2*). It shows that there were 1,031 entrants across the four years, with 1939 witnessing the greatest number of players entering when 273 were registered to play across the seven events.

*(Insert Table 2: The Geographical Location of Entrants for Bournemouth Open Week 1936-1939 near here)*

When applying the three-level methodology to determine the entrant’s geographical origin, it shows that 67.7% lived in Bournemouth or within a 12 - mile radius of the town. A further 11.9% were from the neighbouring tri-counties of Dorset, Hampshire and Wiltshire.[[15]](#endnote-15) This meant 19.2% were ‘distant visitors’, including one competitor in 1939 from overseas, who gave their address as Pennant Hills, Sydney, Australia. Finally, 1.2% of the entries only listed the player’s name, with no home address recorded and so they could not be included in this analysis. This, however, provides a sample size of 31.1% or 321 competitors that travelled a distance to compete in the tournament and can be considered golfing visitors to Bournemouth. Across the first three years of the study, there was a gentle downward trend in the number of golfing visitors attending, from 35% to 27% in 1938, but this was reversed in 1939 when the numbers rose back to 30%.

Golf Weeks did achieve their objective in attracting a noteworthy number of visitors to Bournemouth each year within this study. In terms of the geographic location of origin of the entrants, there is evidence that Dorset, Greater London and Hampshire provided the largest number of competitors with 58, 50 and 49 respectively. (*Table 2*)

*(Insert Table 3: Geographical Location of Entries near here)*

Indeed, visitors travelled from 33 different English counties to compete including Yorkshire, Lincolnshire and Norfolk together with players from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This is also represented pictorially in (*Table 3*) which reflects the density of geographical origin. The map also shows that it was not just a local ‘Southern’ tournament with one entrant, Harvey Keighley from Bradford [Yorkshire] travelling 270 miles (one-way), and another Dr R.G.J. McCullagh from Cleethorpes Lincolnshire coming 260 miles to attend. Even greater distances were required, for example, Mr Pentland from Scotland journeying south on more than one occasion from Edinburgh, a distance of over 450 miles and Dr Gilbert thrice travelling from Northern Ireland which would have exceeded 500 miles including his boat journey. Three further discoveries in this study identify the ‘quality’ of the entrants’ home-courses, the proficiency and the age of the visiting golfers. Firstly, the competitors played their ‘home-golf’ at several illustrious clubs, which demonstrates that the reputation of the Bournemouth Tournament was able to attract entrants from this stratum of golf clubs. This included three Open Championship courses: Princes, Birkdale[[16]](#endnote-16) and most notably St. Andrews. Other ‘Royal’ clubs to provide competitors included Royal Norfolk, Royal Mid-Surrey and Royal Belfast and finally one competitor listed Wentworth as his home club. A club that had hosted the Open Championship would have carried significant kudos and so attracting members from these clubs was a significant achievement for the organisers of the Bournemouth Tournament.[[17]](#endnote-17) Secondly, a marker of the quality of the golf is the ability or proficiency of the players participating. Of the 174 visitors, five players had a handicap of scratch or better. A further 119 were single figure handicaps, only eight entered with a handicap above 20 and the average handicap was fractionally over 10. Therefore, the players competing in the 1936 - 1939 Bournemouth Tournaments were evidently of good quality with high skill levels to playoff the handicaps they possessed. Finally, to become proficient in any sport, time to practise is required as skills are learnt rather than instinctive; even the basic skills need to be developed. This can often be reflected in a person’s age, and the records show that the average age of the visiting competitor in the Bournemouth Opens was 45 years old. The oldest visitor was Robert Pentland of Edinburgh who was born in 1861 and so when he entered the 1939 event he was 78 years old, but still playing off a ‘good’ handicap of 10 at his home course of Bruntsfield GC. The youngest was aged nineteen, a Mr R.B. Lauriston, who was an articled solicitor and played his golf at Enfield GC near his north London home. Mr Lauriston’s handicap is somewhat counterintuitive to the age and ability principle, as his handicap was 4 and another competitor, a Mr D.F. Burns, playing at Wimbledon Park GC, by the age of 22 had become a scratch golfer. Mr Burns’ occupation as a stock-broking clerk and like Mr Lauriston’s provides a clue as to how they both defied their lack of age-related experience. Both young gentlemen also enjoyed having a father whose occupation provided another essential commodity that allowed a sportsman to develop their sporting skills, that is, money. Mr Lauriston’s father was a solicitor and Mr Burns’ father was a retired banker and so both young men are likely to have had the opportunity to play golf from an early age at their father’s club and to receive tuition from the club professional.

*A Social Profile of the Competitors at the 1936 - 1939 Bournemouth Open Amateur Golf Tournaments*

Lastly, when summarising the 321 visiting competitors over the four years of the study, it revealed that 174 unique individuals travelled to Bournemouth, as several of the players were regulars who attended on more than one occasion. To identify these 174 individuals in terms of their demographic and socio-economic status, the 1939 Register was used. The 1939 Register was effectively a census listing the personal details of every civilian in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It was undertaken following Britain’s declaration of war with Germany, and it was a critical tool in coordinating the war effort. Of the 174 individuals, only 125 were traceable. Reasons for this variation can be explained when considering that the war had commenced three weeks before the Register was compiled, and a number of the men who played in the Bournemouth Tournaments had already commenced their military service. Some families, particularly in the cities, would have been evacuated. Others would have moved house for no war-related reasons since their addresses were listed in the 1936 Bournemouth Tournament records. However, a sample size of 125 (72%) can still be considered to be significant and it meant that it was possible to draw some meaningful conclusions from the analysis of the available information.

The economist Routh, in his studies published in the 1960s, identified seven different occupational classifications and calculated the distribution by class as per (*Table 4*).[[18]](#endnote-18)

*(Insert Table 4: Routh’s 1960s Occupational classifications near here)*

Whereas, the sports historian, Vamplew used an extended version of Routh’s categories in his study of professional sport in *Pay Up and Play the Game*, adding the Aristocracy and Gentry to the top of the list and locating Managers as a separate classification between Employers and Proprietors and Clerical Workers. This enabled a socio - economic analysis of golfing visitors competing at the 1936-1939 Bournemouth Opens to be completed. The results are shown in (*Table 5*).

*(Insert Table 5: Occupational classification of the entrants to the 1936-39 Bournemouth Amateur Opens near here)*

Amongst the 57 who can be considered to hold Professional occupations, there were: eleven bank managers, eleven doctors, ten company directors, six engineers, four accountants, four solicitors and three military officers. Other Professionals included teachers, men who had taken up Holy Orders, an architect, a quantity surveyor, a Royal Air Force (RAF) instructor and a maritime pilot. Within the 23 Employers, there were twelve involved with the production of goods or services and five hoteliers or restaurant owners. Also, within this classification was a golf club secretary who would have been responsible for employing greenkeepers, a golf professional and catering staff within the club. The twenty Managers included twelve shopkeepers of different varieties and two car dealers. The largest group within the clerks comprised of eight bank clerks, many given their young age would have had ambitions to be upwardly mobile and progress to the Professional classification in time. Within the lower occupational classification, there were a small number of foremen, a baker, a tailor and a retired locomotive driver. Finally, two men have been classified as semi-skilled, one a general labourer and the other a hotel pantryman. Amongst the competitors, there were two who had previously been professional sportsmen in different sports. John Santall was an English first-class cricketer who played eight matches for Worcestershire in the early 1930s before retiring to become a professional ice-skater and instructor.[[19]](#endnote-19) Secondly, Chris Buckley played football for Brighton, Aston Villa and Arsenal between 1905 and 1921. After retiring from football, he became a sales manager but Buckley also combined this job with joining Aston Villa’s board of directors in 1936.[[20]](#endnote-20) Santall and Buckley were also gifted sportsmen in their second sport, playing off 5 and plus-1 respectively, according to the list of player’s handicaps in the Bournemouth entry register.

When establishing a benchmark to assess the composition of the golfing tourists who descended upon Bournemouth in the 1930s, there has been no comprehensive, in-depth analysis of golf club membership compositions from the pre-war years. However, there are several small-scale and individual studies published that have identified the structure of the ‘typical golfing participant’. Tranter surveyed the socio - occupational composition of the sportsmen in the Stirling area of Scotland at the end of the nineteenth century. It revealed that different classes followed their own form of sports but around nine out of ten golf club members were of social class B; annuitants, bank clerks, clerical workers, hoteliers and teachers with the rest from class A, the gentry; those living on their ‘own means.’ Not a single golfer was from classes D or E farm labourers and other general labourers.[[21]](#endnote-21) One more relevant study that has been undertaken is David Martin’s review of the membership at Minchinhampton GC in Gloucestershire. In this, he found that they were mainly landowners, proprietors of the major local industries such as woollen mills and engineering works, doctors, lawyers and the clergy, as well as serving and retired officers of the armed forces.[[22]](#endnote-22) Finally, at the Royal Isle of Wight GC, a list of the 1912 membership revealed that the composition of the members followed similar traits with this audit of the entrants to the Bournemouth Golf Weeks. It found there to be a mix of army and navy men, and also some Reverends and other men who had taken up Holy Orders. Further examples of middle to upper-middle-class professions include a clerk in the Parliamentary Office of the House of Lords, a retired High Sheriff, an author, a master merchant marine and a bank agent.[[23]](#endnote-23) When summarising the golfing tourists competing in the Bournemouth Amateur Open they appear to conform to the previous research in that the majority of the competitors were drawn from the professional occupational class. There was a high propensity of bankers, doctors, military officers and manufacturing employers. The most striking result to emerge from the data is that about 90% of the competitors were from the upper echelons of society. In contrast, according to Routh, this demographic only accounted for 20% of the total UK population in the 1930s. This suggests that golf and holiday golf was still significantly played by this section of society. However, it is essential to note that the Bournemouth Open did attract Percy Elvery whose occupation was listed as a general labourer and Ralph Parsons working as a pantryman in a Devon hotel. Their occupations can both be classified as semi-skilled or skilled at best. So along with the drivers, foreman, baker, tailor, motion picture technician and an assistant in an electrical supply company this research provides further examples of a small but significant presence of skilled and working class holiday golfers playing in the competitions. As an ‘Open’ competition with no restrictions to who could enter, other than paying the modest entrance fees, it meant that these men could share the links and compete with golfers from more elevated professions. This is a critical revelation, as it demonstrates, along with the existence of the ladies’ week and the inclusion of the mixed event within the men’s week, that golf tourism did make some incremental improvements in making the game more accessible, both physically and socially, for the masses by starting to break down some of the social and cultural barriers.

*Conclusion*

This analysis provides an insight into how the municipal golfing offer and the organisation of ‘Golf Weeks’ or tournaments were designed to encourage visitors to the town. The golf weeks were designed to enhance Bournemouth’s reputation through golf. They enticed the ‘out of town’ golfers to visit and to challenge their golfing skills on the seaside courses.

The case study, using the Bournemouth Golf Weeks, is not to suggest it was a unique or a single example. As the home of the first English municipal course and the subsequent organisation of a nationally advertised ‘Open’ competition in 1895, it did have an element of historical precedence in this field. This study contextualises how the corporation and local businesses recognised that the hosting of annual golf events would significantly help them achieve the objective of publicising the town and increasing the economic benefits that golfing tourists would bring. This was unmistakably underpinned in terms of the overall numbers and the participation of golfing tourists from across the British Isles, representing almost one-third of all the competitors.

The analysis of the demographics, including the occupational classifications of the visiting golfers competing in the golf weeks is a significant addition to our knowledge on the socio - economic status of interwar golf tourists. This research has shown that the majority of the golfer’s position and rank in society was similar to previous research; it did reveal however a minority presence of the entrants were from manual working-class occupations. Together with the various events for women provides us with consistent evidence of how the normal barriers to participation in golf in the pre-war period were being challenged by golf tourism.

*Endnotes*

1. *Bournemouth Daily Echo*, 23 January 1904 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Bournemouth Parks and Pleasure Grounds Committee Minutes, 12 October 1894 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Bournemouth Parks and Pleasure Grounds Committee Minutes, 19 April 1895; *Bournemouth Guardian*, 22 June 1895 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. **Jenkins** L, *Golf in Hardy Country*, Roman Press Limited, 39 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. *Bournemouth Guardian*, 22 June 1895 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. *Golf*, 24 January 1896; Bournemouth Parks and Pleasure Grounds Committee Minutes, 6 March 1896; 13 April 1896 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. *Bournemouth Evening Echo*, 29 April 1903, 20 April 1909. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Bournemouth Second Annual Open Amateur Golf Tournament 1932 Programme [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. *Bournemouth Evening Echo*, 5 May 1932, 9 May 1932 [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. *Bournemouth Evening Echo*, 16 May 1932 [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Bournemouth Second Annual Open Amateur Golf Tournament 1932 Programme [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Bournemouth Golf Tournament: Register of Entries for Men’s Meeting, Bournemouth Golf Alliance Archive [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. **Inglis** F, *The Delicious History of the Holiday*, Routledge, 8 [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. *Bournemouth Evening Echo,* 18 May 1936 [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Note that Bournemouth was in Hampshire until the 1974 Local Government reorganisation [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Birkdale was not granted the ‘Royal’ title until 1951 [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. **Wheeler** P, ‘An Ambitious Club on a Small Scale’, *Sport in History,* 477-497 [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. **Routh** G, *Occupation and Pay*, Cambridge University Press, 6 [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. *The Cricketer*, May 1987 [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. **Carder** T and **Harris** R, *Albion A–Z: A Who's Who of Brighton & Hove Albion F.C.,* Goldstone Books, 14 [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. **Tranter** N, *Sport, economy and society in Britain 1750-1914*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, 40 [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. **Martin** D, *Minchinhampton Golf Club Centenary History 1889-1989*, Minchinhampton Golf Club, 68 [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. The 1912 List of Members for the Royal Isle of Wight Golf Club was obtained from the private collection of Philip Truett. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)