

The Bernard Darwin Trophy: Reflections on 2019

Unguided missiles

Anyone arriving at wonderful Woking Golf Club recently might have noticed, as they looked over the pond to the 18th green, one of the decoy swans upside down in the water. The floating duck-deterrent had been torpedoed by an errant golf ball, presumably despatched, with some purpose, from the middle of the fairway.

We are reliably informed that this particular shot was not played by a contestant in any of the Darwin competitions. But, sitting comfortably on the Club veranda, assembled like a jury in a 1920's courtroom, we did see some interesting approaches to the 14th hole this year. One particular shot will remain in memories for a long time. A Reptonian, identity retained for obvious reasons, hit an approach to the 14th, which flew like a missile over the green, at head height, struck the large tree overlooking the 18th green and returned to a perfect spot below the pin on the 14th: a straightforward par obviously.



Not to be outdone, the Senior Darwin also provided its entertainment. Richard Thompson (aka The Gorilla) was seen playing Malvern's approach shot to the 14th from a position next to the steps to the putting green. This required a delicate wedge shot to be played over the clubhouse. Alas, The Gorilla failed this examination, the ball deflected off the roof-tiles and Malvern lost the hole.

The Bernard Darwin Trophy tops quite a year for Malvern

We were delighted to return to Woking Golf Club this year for the 61st playing of the Bernard Darwin Trophy. Tonbridge was defending its title and we were greeted by the most glorious day and a golf course in wonderful condition.

In a series of shocks, the last three winners of the Darwin were knocked out on the first day. Uppingham was despatched by Marlborough on Thursday morning and Tonbridge was beaten by Winchester in the afternoon, when Malvern also beat Charterhouse.

It is quite rare that the Highgate team wakes up on the Friday of the Darwin still dreaming of title glory, but they earned that pleasure this year by winning against Eton on Thursday morning and Rugby after lunch. Sadly the dream ended on Friday morning when Harrow put them to the sword.

In the other side of the draw, Malvern beat Winchester 2-1 in the semi-final to set up a final with the Harrovians. Harrow came into the match with one more point from their earlier rounds than Malvern and both teams looked very strong on paper. But Malvern really found another gear and the first two pairs, Barrett-Greene & Coleman and Davis & Manduca won with holes to spare.

So congratulations to Malvern on only its third victory in the Bernard Darwin Trophy. It was fitting



that the team was supported on the day by two veterans of the victorious 2001 side, Bruce Streather and Jeremy Lowe. It has been quite a year for Malvern who add the Darwin to their victory in the Halford Hewitt, topped off by the announcement that an Old Malvernian, Clive Edginton, was named as the incoming Captain of The Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews. Clive was there supporting Malvern during the Darwin and was delighted to be presented the trophy by David Wright, President of Woking Golf Club.

Number six for Charterhouse in the Senior Darwin

Two weeks earlier we had welcomed the Senior Darwin to Woking with very different weather conditions. The Committee was urged to review the practicalities of getting players off the course in the event of thunder and lightning. Was the claxon loud enough for the hard of hearing? Fortunately, the claxon lay silent and all enjoyed some very competitive golf.



This year we used the yellow tees for the Senior Darwin. So, the course was shorter, but the greens were really slick and Woking was, as usual, a very good test. The big result of the first day was the defeat of the holders, Repton. Eton came from behind in the vital match to secure victory and would go on to play Charterhouse in their semi-final. In the other semi-final, 2017 winners Tonbridge lined up against Malvern.

The tightest match on Day Two was the top match between Charterhouse and Eton, in which Robinson & Wreford secured a victory for the Carthusians on the 18th. At the top of the draw, the match between Tonbridge and Malvern was decided by the last game, in which Connell & Hubbard of Tonbridge edged out Hendicott & Thompson. So a Tonbridge versus Charterhouse final and the Surrey school turned on the style to take the match 3-0. John Pearmund captained the side and received the trophy from David Wright.

Plates and an Ace

Both the Darwin and Senior Darwin run Plate competitions. This year Repton won the Darwin version and Marlborough won the Senior Darwin Plate. The Senior Darwin result was topped off for Marlborough with a hole in one by Jeremy Cornish at the 7th hole, which left us wondering if we could claim the champagne on Woking's insurance: sadly not, but congratulations to Jeremy.

New silverware for the Veterans



Last but not least, we were delighted to host the Darwin Veterans. It was a special occasion because we were presented with the new Veteran Darwin salver, which was commissioned by the Golf Societies of Eton and Wellington. Both schools had won the Veteran competition seven times in its 28-year history. It is a very elegant trophy for the Veterans and it was won on this occasion by the Harrow pairing of Philip d'Abo and John Sheffield.

As usual, we award a Nett prize alongside the Scratch version of the Veteran competition. The Nett score is calculated after an age allowance, with

additional points awarded to pairs with combined ages of 156 or more. We had a terrific result this year, with Old Reptonian pair Denis O'Neill and John Graham taking the prize. Their combined age came in at a lofty 173. So well played the octogenarian Reptiles. There must be something in the porridge up there in Derbyshire.

So another year goes by for the Darwin competitions. The camaraderie and competitive spirit makes this a wonderful occasion. In an article in the American Golfer in 1924, Bernard Darwin reminded his audience of the delicious expression "good useless golf", which reflects on golf well played but a match lost. There was plenty of good useless golf at the Darwin competitions this year but also enough of the opposite ("bad useful golf") to encourage debate over a good Woking lunch.

Our thanks, as ever, go to the teams at Woking Golf Club, which presented the course in super condition and provided us with first class hospitality. And to all our Darwin friends, we look forward to seeing you in 2020.

The Committee of The Bernard Darwin Trophy

