

Extract from “My Life and Soft Times”, Henry Longhurst, written in 1971 on his recollections of the Halford Hewitt tournament in which he played for 12 years.

I suppose my most nostalgic memories must relate to the most remarkable of all golf tournaments, the Halford Hewitt, for which teams of ten a side from fifty or sixty schools, together with innumerable camp-followers, converge every April upon the little town of Deal. I am assured, and can only hope it is true, that a small group of people, including John Beck (later to become the only winning British Walker Cup captain) and Sir Harold Gillies, “the well-known plastic surgeon”, were discussing at lunch at Addington the desirability of founding an annual competition for teams of public school old boys, and that the details having been agreed, somebody, almost certainly Beck, said, “Now all we need is some bloody fool to present a Cup.” At this moment Halford Hewitt walked in, to find himself almost at once immortalized as the founder of the best-loved tournament in golf. I myself was fortunate indeed. In the six years before the war during which I played for the Carthusian team we won five times and reached the semi-final in the other year, so that every year we saw it right through to the end. I am afraid we gained the reputation of being a far from teetotal lot and tended to make too much noise at the hotel, but it was all good schoolboy stuff. Hal, himself a Carthusian, presided in theory over the party. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*, but it cannot be denied that at this time of his life he was not particularly “with it” and did indeed make the perfect butt. In our sitting-room, when he picked up a paper, the nearest man automatically put a match to it – time and time again, and every time producing the same reactions of outraged dignity, so that it makes me smile even as I write it down. Every night he insisted on playing bridge and this time it was the nearest man’s job, since he was rather deaf, to inform the other of the contents of his hand, so that I dare say some of the most preposterous bids in the history of the game were made late in the evening in order to get him out somewhere near all square. Harrow shared the same hotel, the old South Eastern at the end of the front, next to the marine depot, and one night it was revealed to Hal that one of the Harrovians, George Henriques, later a president of the English Golf Union, was plotting to come in and pull his leg dressed up as a policeman. Henriques then went out and got a real policeman and the ensuing scene during dinner was not unmemorable.

On joining the Carthusian team, I shared a bedroom with that gay cavalier of golf Dale Bourn, and played in the bottom foursome with John Morrison, and thus it remained for six hilarious years. As well as John Beck, we also had such characters as J-a-a-ck Thompson, a prosperous Lincolnshire farmer and noted shot, who would come straight back from ski-ing and hit no.1 irons dead straight through a cold east wind; Lionel Burdon-Sanderson, never heard of in competitive golf, who had often just come back from shooting lions; Pat White and Cecil Middleton, whose single in the university match of 1933 at Prince’s, Sandwich, is still remembered; and, above all, as Trainer, the one and only Ben Travers, still tremendous company today at the age of 84. It was characteristic of this humble and very “human” man that while still at the height of his fame as creator of the immortal Aldwych farces, recently revived on television, he should take with serious delight his duties of bringing the Eno’s round on a silver tray each morning – always a wise insurance in the strong air of the south-east coast – and purveying the gin-and-kummel behind the 7th and 14th greens.

My partner, John Morrison, known inevitably in the Press as the “ex-Cambridge Triple Blue” – he played cricket and soccer for the University before the First War and golf and cricket after it – was a “character” if ever there was one, and if our partnership gained something of a Halford Hewitt

notoriety it was due almost entirely to his eccentricities, both on and off the course. So, I suspect, was our continued success – beaten only once in six years and then when the main match was over. I was strictly the “straight” man. Morrison, however, carried seven or eight clubs sprouting from a torn canvas bag and bearing little or no relation to each other, mostly with hickory shafts and some with handles as thick as cricket bats’. He tended to appear in a deerstalker hat and a huge teddy-bear coat done up with string round the middle, which reduced him to about a quarter-swing, and, when it rained, he produced a vast waterproof skirt instead of trousers. By the time our opponents had recovered from the impact of his clothing, his clubs and his methods – it was nothing for him to take a putter from sixty yards – they were liable to be three down.

He became, of course, a legend, and I was perhaps the middleman that helped to sustain it. It would not, I think, be uncharitable to say that my old friend tended, like so many of us, to be “better after lunch”, and it was with some foreboding, therefore, that I set out with him one morning at the ungodly hour of 7.20, still dark enough for the Goodwins Lightship to be still flashing rather than hooting in the Channel. At the second hole he hit our second shot, with an evil-looking brassie, straight through a perishing cold headwind to within ten feet of the flag. Neither Cotton, Hogan nor Palmer could have done it better. Before anyone could find the appropriate comment for this extraordinary and unexpected stroke, Morrison had looked at his watch and cried, “Seven forty!” It was at the same hole that in an after-lunch final I drove our ball into a bird’s-nest lie in the rough. When I reached the scene, I found him and his caddie tugging one at each end of his brassie, like two chickens with a worm. “No, no, sir!” the caddie was saying, to which Morrison was replying, “’s all right. ‘s all right. It’s teed up.” He hit it about four yards.

I am often asked if the story of Morrison and the taxi is true, and the answer is that it is. On the morning that he hit the brassie shot at 7.40, we won our match very easily and were knocking on the door of the Chequers, the small incongruous pub beside the 14th green, by 9.20. Old Mr Marsh, who was born and lived all his seventy-five years in the Chequers, declared that he was not open, to which Morrison replied that it was all right, as he, Morrison, was a magistrate. Duly admitted through this remarkable assertion, my partner held court till such time as we could never walk all the way back to the clubhouse in time for lunch and the afternoon round. He therefore not only summoned a taxi from Deal but, fortified by a three-hour sojourn in the Chequers, ordered it again for the afternoon, on the natural assumption that we should again win by at least 5 and 4. We were duly five up with five to play and I have always thought it to be poetic justice that our opponents holed a long, fluky putt across the newly laid green and we had to go on. One of the caddies was sent surreptitiously round behind the Chequers to warn the taxi and, unbeknownst to our opponents, it followed slowly alongside the course, until such time as the match had gone to the 17th and it was not worth taking it at all.

I doubt whether they make all-rounders like Morrison today. Younger people these days may be forgiven for being unable to imagine the impact made upon soccer in the twenties by that happy band of brothers known as the Corinthians. I remember vividly waiting for the result of their great cup-tie with Blackburn Rovers and the jubilation when we learnt of their victory. Little did I suspect that I should spend so many a memorable hour with the man who had been their captain on that historic day.