

Chapter 15 – ‘A Record Return to The Open’

From Bert Gadd’s Autobiography.

This chapter of Bert’s book tells of his qualifying campaign at Arrowse Park and Hoylake



My first tour outing for 1947 was at the Hoylake Open and the headline on the sports page of the Daily Mail on July 1st said: “GADD BACK WITH 66” and went on to talk of my impressive re-appearance in championship golf. Unfortunately they were not referring to the championship proper, but the qualifying rounds, which took place over the Royal Liverpool course and nearby Arrowse Park. Making his Open debut that year was the sixteen-year-old Peter Alliss and I remember him working with his father, Percy, on the Hoylake practise ground. Peter wrote in his 1984 book *The Open*: “Bert Gadd, a name from the 1930s, had a 66 at Arrowse Park”; the course record was a great start to my first post-war championship and I began to hope that I might be a name in the forties as well! The next best score at Arrowse Park that day was 70, shared by the runner-up in the previous year’s amateur championship, American Bob Sweeney and the Australian pro Norman von Nida, who was to have his peak year in 1947, winning the Vardon Trophy with seven victories in Britain and setting a new record stroke average of 71.25. My partner, Ken Bousfield, the Coombe Hill assistant, and Eric Brown, then at the Northumberland GC in Newcastle, both shot 77. (Ten years later they were to feature in the dramatic Ryder cup match at Lindrick.) The following day Johnny Bulla came close to my record with a 67.

In my second qualifying round at Hoylake I had a 77 and *The Times* said that my putter “was not in the same obliging mood this time”. Strangely it never did seem to oblige me on Hoylake’s greens, which they say are the truest anywhere. I qualified in joint fourth place on 143, with Dai Rees. Von Nida shot a fine 69 to lead the qualifiers on 139. At almost 7000 yards in length

Royal Liverpool was one of the severest tests presented to an Open field at that time – “the toughest course I have ever seen”, said Bernard Darwin. At the 6th - ‘Briars’, where the carry over the out of bounds orchard was around 200 yards, the veteran George Duncan put three into the orchard and took eleven on his way to an 87. The next hole is ‘Dowie’, a par-3 of 198 yards, where the out of bounds was only a few yards left of the green; a grim prospect with the wind howling off the right.

“The out of bounds were indeed a terrifying feature of the Hoylake of that time”, wrote Peter Alliss. The members had their own rule before the war in match play competitions, which the Times described as the “Classic Hoylake penalty of distance only”. When, in preparation for the 1939 Amateur Championship, they announced that the rule was to be abandoned and the rule of golf played, which demands stroke and distance, the Times correspondent wrote the following: “As a humble adorer I take up my testimony against such change, which will in match play take half the spice out of some great holes. --- The rule of golf is a very good rule”, he went on, “where it is only possible to go out of bounds once or twice, but at Hoylake it is an ever lurking peril and one distinguished friend of mine boasts that, in the course of his life, he has been out of bounds at fifteen of the eighteen holes ----- Oh beloved Hoylake, how can you bear to do it”, he concluded – Very Darwinian!

Peter Alliss had an 86 in his Hoylake qualifying round and did not make it to the championship proper. I had the same score at a very windy Hoylake to miss the cut. He was not yet battle hardened and I had been out of the fray for too long. Another 86 was scored by one of the most consistent players in the game, Syd Scott, who was to succeed my brother George at Roehampton, but was then at Carlisle City. Bob Sweeney, who was second at Arrowe Park in qualifying, had a ‘No Return’. Hoylake humbled some good players that year. Norman von Nida, who had been in fine form, did make the cut, but blamed the “worst hazard of all at Hoylake” - the wind, for costing him his chance in that Open. He told how he and his partner, Henry Cotton, had

been unable to get through the revolving door out on to the course, so strong was the wind and had to go out through the main entrance.