

The Hitler Golf Trophy of 1936 – by Mr R of Scarborough

What is the connection between golf in Scarborough and Adolf Hitler? Surely there isn't one, I hear you say! Well read on.

In 1936 the Olympic Games in Berlin failed to confirm Hitler's Aryan race as being world dominant. Indeed, the star of the Games was the black athlete James Cleveland (Jesse) Owens who picked up four gold medals (for 100m, 200m, long jump and 4x100m relay). Von Ribbentrop, understanding Hitler's disappointment, was aware that Germany happened to have two world class golfers and he suggested that Hitler should announce an international golf competition to be held in Baden Baden, Germany and invite all 36 golfing nations to enter a pair of players. The competition was to be played in 4 rounds over 2 days with both pairs' scores to count and the lowest aggregate score of the pairs to win.

England entered a pair of golfers which included Bridlington's Tommy Thirsk who played his golf at Ganton Golf Club, originally known as the Scarborough Golf Club. His partner was Arnold Bentley from Hesketh Golf Club near Southport. On the assumption that the German pair would end up victors on their home course, Hitler was asked to include in his diary for a journey to Baden Baden to award the trophy. Although the Olympic Games had just been played there was resistance to participation by many nations and only nine golfing nations eventually submitted teams and two of these (Sweden and Switzerland) pulled out before the event began leaving Just Germany, France, Holland, Czechoslovakia, Italy, Hungary and England to compete for the trophy.

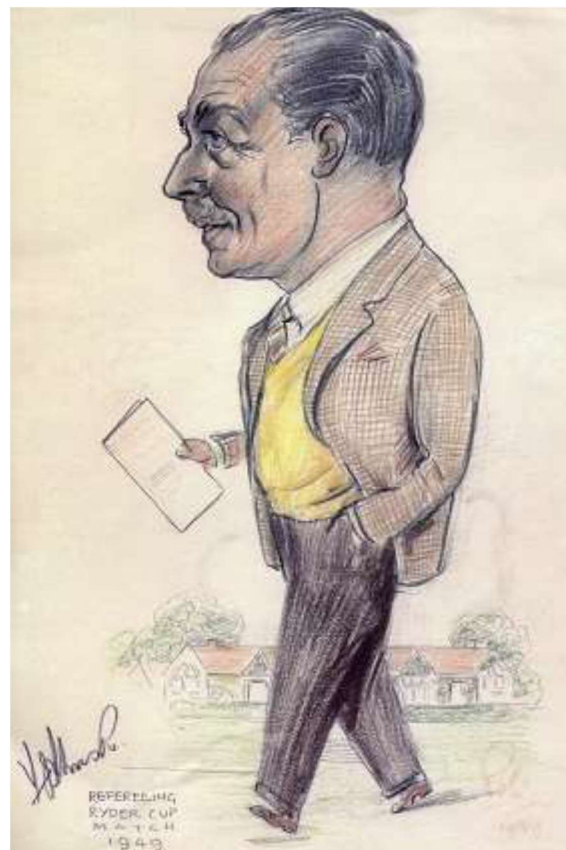
At the end of the first (morning) Tommy Thirsk's round of 70 and Bentley's round of 73 put England and Germany level on 143. The afternoon round saw the Germans pull away with an aggregate score of 140. Tommy Thirsk repeated his morning score of 70 and Bentley shot 74. After day one, therefore, the leaders were Germany – 282, England – 287 and France – 292. A very happy Von Ribbentrop messaged Hitler to tell him that their pair would win and to make the journey to present the trophy.

However, on the following morning, the third round did not go to plan, the German pair making 72 and 76 adding 148 to their aggregate score. The French pair improved markedly to hit 68 and 69, overhauling the German pair by one shot. However, the English pair, Bentley making 70, and Tommy Thirsk breaking the course record with a magnificent 65 left the aggregate scores at England 422, France 429 and Germany 430. This left Von Ribbentrop having to find a way to intercept a furious Hitler on his journey and instructing him to return to Berlin. That afternoon, the German pair could do no better than an aggregate score of 143. The French scored 66 and 71 to put pressure on the English team. Bradley's 75 put all the pressure on Tommy Thirsk's shoulders who responded magnificently. He managed to repeat what was now his own course record with a glorious 65. The final aggregate scores were therefore, England – 562, France – 566 and Germany – 574. Von Ribbentrop's plan was in tatters but Tommy Thirsk's four round aggregate score of 270 was one of the best ever for a 72 hole championship.

The corollary to the story is that the trophy, a silver-gilt salver with 8 amber stones inlaid, became a little undesirable for anyone's trophy cupboard given what happened next and it disappeared from view for many years. Very much later in 2004, the trophy was discovered in the possession of Leonard Sculthorp who lived in Glasgow and whose company had bought the assets of the demised The Golfer's Club. In 2012 he agreed to put the trophy up for auction. A Hesketh Golf Club Member bid for the trophy and was up against a telephone bidder. At £15,000 the Hesketh bidder successfully killed off the competition and the bid was accepted. Later it emerged that the telephone bidder had been a representative of the German Golf Union leading many to speculate whether the trophy would ever have been seen again if it had been successful.



The 14 inch silver gilt salver with eight inlaid Baltic Amber stones



A caricature of Tommy Thirsk