

## HOWLEY HALL

**The original Howley Hall**, the remains of which you will see alongside the 17th fairway, was built probably by Sir Robert Smythson, famous Elizabethan architect/builder, and completed in 1590 at great expense. Sir John Savile, later Lord Savile, inherited the vast Savile estate after his father's death.

The Hall was 56 metres square, with an internal courtyard. There were two gateways, kitchen gardens to the south east, a privy garden on the south side, terraced parlour gardens to the north (over our 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> fairways), and parterre gardens leading to the gatehouse on the western side. Beyond the gatehouse was a fine bowling green, now our 17th green.

The present clubhouse was the Bailiff's house, and it is here that Lord Savile lived till the Hall was completed. Savile was one of two MPs for West Yorkshire, and, most probably, the wealthiest landowner and businessman in Yorkshire. He became the 1<sup>st</sup> Alderman (Mayor) of Leeds in 1626. On his death in 1630, the Hall passed to his son, Viscount Thomas.

The Hall was besieged by the Royalist army under William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, in June, 1643; after several days' bombardment it was taken, and seriously plundered. Eventually, the Hall was acquired by the earls of Cardigan through the marriage of Lady Frances Savile to Lord Francis Brudenell, soon to be Earl of Cardigan. But, the Hall, being too expensive to maintain, was blown up in about 1717, and only parts of it remained standing. Many buildings in the locality made use of the the Hall's stone over the following centuries.

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Howley Hall opened for golf in 1900, with 9 holes in play for both ladies and gentlemen members. It was extended in 1908 to 18 holes. In 1925 the Board bought Howley from the Earl of Cardigan for £4250.

Originally, Howley Hall golf course was a moorland course, but extensive tree-planting has transformed its appearance over the years, so much so that it has become more parkland than moorland. It has frequently been modified and extended over its 122 years, and is now a challenging yet extremely attractive course for members and visitors of all abilities to enjoy.

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# A BRIEF HISTORY OF HOWLEY HALL



*'Aedes elegantissimus'*

## INTRODUCTION

If I say the word 'history', I'm quite well aware that some people's eyes will glaze over and a blank expression will descend gently over their face. I'm also aware that it is thirty years since I first put pen to paper (yes, pen and paper – no computer) to try to tell the story of Howley Hall, and the first days of the golf club.

A generation of golfers will have come to Howley, as members or visitors, and will possibly know little of the Howley estate, the events, the people, and the story of the Hall. There is also so much to tell about the fascinating development of Howley Hall golf club.

If your main interest lies in the history of the Hall itself, you can skip on to page 11. If you might also be interested in the golf club and the course, then read on.

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The story begins in 1585, with the building of Howley Hall; it continues with an account of the golf club from 1900.

This booklet does not seek to discuss every single change of the design and layout of the course – that is a special topic on its own, as the Howley course has had numerous reincarnations in the one hundred and twenty-two years of its existence. What I hope it achieves is to call to mind, as you play the course, hole by hole, just a few of the interesting features that make up Howley Hall today.

{Before this potted history gets under way, I wish to apologise for re-using some of the drawings, photographs and illustrations from my 1993 'History of Howley Hall and the Golf Club'. There may well be some who have not seen a copy of that book, and illustrations are scarce.}

## The Round Begins Here.

### 1.

If you never played golf with Ronny Gaunt and Adam Honeysett in the 1960s/1970s, you missed a very special experience. They played single-figure golf – and talked about, and analysed, the condition of the golf course non-stop throughout their round. It was an education in itself to play with them, and, if you listened carefully, you gained a fair idea about the course.

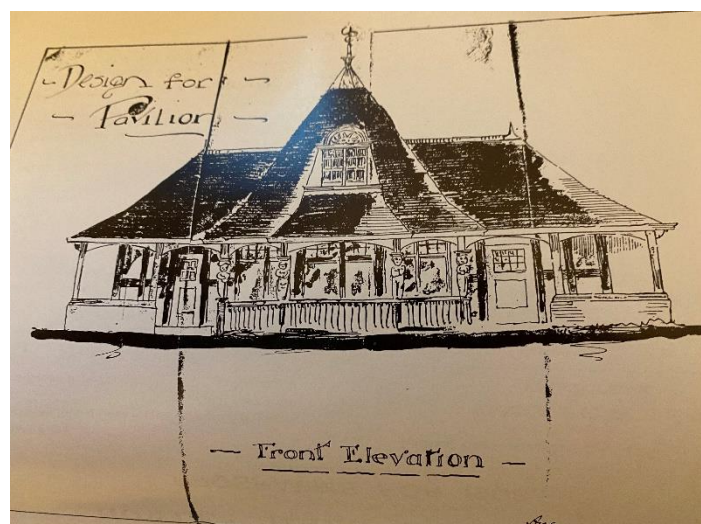


Before you start, take a quick look at the stone planter on the side of the putting green. It is over 400 years old – and, say it quietly – worth a lot! It was in poor shape till a few years ago Frank Eastwood took the project on board to keep the stonework together – and made a very good job of it. Take a second look at the faces carved on it.

***The elevated 1<sup>st</sup> Tee (above)***

### ***Proposed Design for Pavilion (1900)***

Some of you will remember when the 1<sup>st</sup> tee was almost level with the path. This new elevated tee is quite impressive and has made a big difference to the first drive.



(Social historians might like to make comment that, while the gentlemen of Howley were striking off the first tee, at the far side of the ruins, workers from the mines, the quarry and the mills in Batley, Birstall, Soothill and Morley may well have been playing the popular sport of knur and spell. Knur (or 'nor') and spell was a game in which a carved, one-ounce ball, made of lignum vitae, or horn loaded with lead, was popped into the air from a

contraption known as a 'spell', and then struck with a bat, often called a 'gelstick'. Good game, and very popular at the time.

Back to the first. Thirty yards or so from the back tee, to the right of the path, opposite where the ladies' first tee now stands, was an elongated hut. The hut used to be the clubhouse when the club first came into being in 1900.

One hundred and twenty-two years ago, as I write, some members from Hanging Heaton looked across the valley beyond Soothill's oak wood hillside, saw the potential for a golf course on the Earl of Cardigan's Howley estate, and bought 65 acres from the West Yorkshire Iron and Coal Co. Ltd.

By 1901, nine holes were playable, with horse-drawn cutters mowing the fairways. It wasn't until 1908 that Howley became an eighteen hole course for gentlemen and, unusually, also for lady members. Some of the men would have looked quite resplendent in their red jackets - their usual attire for golf.

Women members didn't exactly dress for golf, with, still, blouses and voluminous skirts and petticoats, or long dresses, or a wide skirt with leather binding. They would have also worn a sort of strap round their knees, called a 'Miss Higgins', to stop their skirts blowing up – fairly necessary on Howley's windswept acres – and a 'motor veil'.

(Don't know why I added that last paragraph – it seemed a good idea at the time, but has only marginal relevance! I don't usually comment on the attire of our lady members!)

Interesting fact related to the above: when Howley Hall Golf Club was inaugurated, it was still frowned upon and regarded as unsuitable for a lady to raise a golf club above the shoulder. 'We must observe that the posture and gestures requisite for a full swing are not particularly graceful when the player is clad in female dress'. So said Lord Wellwood at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He should see them now! Move on.



***Members at a prize presentation –  
1906 – Captain's Prize.***

***The cup is still on display in the trophy  
cabinet!***



## 2.

There used to be a pond in front of the second tee, about fifteen yards across – quite a daunting hazard. Thousands of balls ended up there, having been topped off the tee. It seemed to attract balls like a magnet. Young lads used to come and fish there for newts and tadpoles, and golf balls!

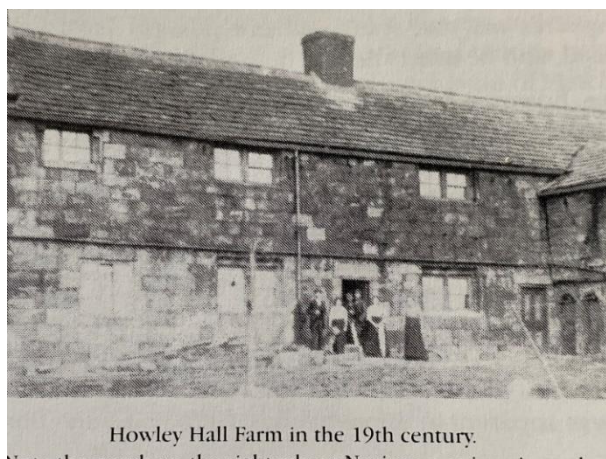
It was this pond on one occasion that a notable older member, Kenny Shoesmith, having driven a number of balls into the said pond, picked up his clubs, strode forward and threw them into the pond. He then followed them by walking straight into the pond, waded through two feet deep water, came out the other side, stumped off to the car park, and, dripping wet, drove home in disgust! Golf can do that to you! (I think he came back later to retrieve his clubs!)

The second green drops down from the fairway. There is a very old retaining stone wall dividing fairway and green. The green is the north garden of the old Bailiff's house.

## 3.

### **John (or William) 'Swift Nick(s)' Nevison, and Howley**

Just about 75 yards up from the third tee, by the ditch on the right hand side of Golf Lane, is the site of the murder of Darcy Fletcher by the highwayman, Pontefract-born John (Swift Nick(s)) Nevison in the 1670s. Nevison frequently came to Howley to see his girlfriend. Seeking the bounty of £20 on the head of the highwayman, John Fletcher and his brother, a local constable, Darcy, overpowered Nevison, and put him in an upstairs room of the porch in the old farm opposite the clubhouse – where the new houses now stand. He escaped by jumping out of a window, and began running towards Morley.



***Howley Hall farm, 19<sup>th</sup> century. The porch from which Nevison escaped can just be seen on the right.***

Seeing him escape, Darcy Fletcher caught up with him; they struggled, and in the fight, Nevison either fatally shot or stabbed Fletcher, and made his escape to York. In 1684, however, Nevison was finally captured at an inn called 'The Sign of the Magpie' in Wakefield (now 'The Three Houses'), at Sandal. He was taken in chains to York, and there hanged on the Knavesmire in May, 1684.

Interesting to note that the famous exploit of highwayman, Dick Turpin – riding from London to York in one day – was actually done, not by Turpin, but by Nevison, some fifty



years before Turpin. Of the many villains of the time, With a mistress up the road at Dunningley, and a ladyfriend here at the Howley alehouse, our clubhouse, Nevison, was considered a gentleman – he robbed his victims most politely! Not unlike Robin Hood, he seems to have robbed the rich and given much to the poor.

For many years a stone on that spot recalled the incident: 'Here Nevison killed (or slew) Fle(t)cher 1684.' The record is not clear as to whether it said 'killed' or 'slew', and the date is wrong. Farmer Brown, owner of the Howley farm in the late nineteenth century, hid the stone to stop sightseers coming on his land, and the stone has not been seen since. It may well still be close by, buried.

The third hole shares some of its fairway with the 6<sup>th</sup> – the 'crossover'. It's not ideal; it causes delays, especially at the weekend. There's also some risk that golfers fail to see another group teeing off from the third tee. A number of reconfigurations have been considered over the years, but for some reason – mainly the cost of setting up new greens – no action has been taken to implement them. The problem remains.

The 3rd is quite a spectacular hole. Down to the left of the tee is the railway cutting, the line coming up from Batley through the tunnel to Morley. Completed in 1848, it is said you can see the light a mile away at the end of the tunnel in Morley, looking from the Batley end of the cutting. The tunnel runs straight under the 6<sup>th</sup> fairway, and that is why, on occasion, depressions in the fairway have occurred.

Progressing further along, as you look past the spoil heap on the right, you'll see the massive railway ventilator shaft that stands at the top of the hill just over Golf Lane. Kestrels have often been seen nesting near the top of the brick shaft. Golf Lane itself was formerly known as 'Whitaker Lane', leading to 'Occupation Road' across the back of the first green.

You may be a little breathless as you finally reach the 3rd green, a distinctive narrow green that, like the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, was originally re-designed by Dr Alister Mackenzie, the world-renowned golf course architect. The two-step changes he made are no longer clearly apparent, however, as further alterations have all-but obliterated Mackenzie's signature concept.

#### **4.**

The 4th used to be another 'Mackenzie' green, though it scarcely could now be recognised as such. This green has caused a great deal of trouble over the years, and visits from the gentlemen of the Sports Turf Research Institute (STRI) at Bingley have resulted in the detection of deficiencies and problems in the surface and below. On more than one occasion, remedial action has had to be taken to overcome sub-surface troubles. Recent years have seen a marked improvement in the playing surface.

Many years ago, the idea of building a new clubhouse was put forward, sited at the top end of the practice ground, but the proposal was not followed up.

## 5. and 6.



The 5th is a good par 4, frequently played into the prevailing wind – and the views over to the Pennines are stunning. From the 6<sup>th</sup> tee, you can look across the railway cutting, and just about detect the flat area of the old 11<sup>th</sup> tee, behind and below the present 16th tee. Some of the older Howley members will quietly tell you that in their youth they fired drives over the cutting for a bit of variety.

## 7. and 8.

The 7<sup>th</sup> for many years was the 2<sup>nd</sup> hole. The roadway alongside on the left was the original lane from Morley to Batley, before Scotchman Lane replaced it. In recent years, golfers have been sometimes bemused and/or annoyed by crows that have swooped down, picked up golf balls in their beaks and flown off with them.

One hundred years ago, the present 8<sup>th</sup> was then the 3<sup>rd</sup>, a dog-leg par 4 that veered away from the railway track (from the stone quarry) that used to run parallel to our 8th.

### The 'Gambling Woods'

To digress a moment. It was during the 1920s that the woods that used to be just beyond our 8th green were known as the 'Gambling woods'; men would come from all around the locality to play pitch and toss, and small fortunes would be won and lost on the throw of dice. Young lads would stand around on or near America Moor (near Asda), and would receive half a crown for directing gamblers to the woods.

Back to the course. Skip the next two paragraphs, if you wish – it's a bit complicated. The aim, however, is just to show how much a part of the course has altered in seventy years. About 1954, the 3<sup>rd</sup> hole, as stated above, was a shortish, dogleg par 4 hole. The 4<sup>th</sup> was a par 3, across and beyond our 9<sup>th</sup> fairway. The 5<sup>th</sup>, then, was a good par 5 back to near our 7<sup>th</sup> green. The 6<sup>th</sup> played parallel with our 7<sup>th</sup> fairway from a tee adjacent to our 7<sup>th</sup> green, to our 9<sup>th</sup> green. The 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> formed a loop round the bottom end of our 9<sup>th</sup>, and the 10<sup>th</sup> in 1954 was similar to our existing 10<sup>th</sup>. With me? Not to worry!

There was then a good walk over to our third tee, and the holes 11, 12, 13 and 14 were not too dissimilar from our present configuration of 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>, except their 14<sup>th</sup>, approximately our 6<sup>th</sup>, had the green sited just over the other side of Golf Lane. That green was relocated to its present site in the early 1960s.

The visualisation of this layout, naturally, and all the other configurations of the course, are best expressed by diagram, obviously, but the aim, in describing how things were, is to remind us how generations of Greens Chairmen and committee members have each striven to put their mark on the course, seeking to obtain the best playing conditions at the time.

The design of golf courses is not set in stone; courses are constantly changing – as witnessed, for example, even today, by the felling and removal of many trees to achieve a particular visual, playing or aesthetic effect.

**9, 10, 11, 12, 13.**

***The 11<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Holes, looking into the misty sun! A motley selection of trees.***



To the left of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> fairways was an extensive and deep stone quarry. The stone was carried by rail to the stone-cutting sheds near our 8<sup>th</sup> tee. It is only in the last two or three decades that the quarry was used as a landfill site, and filled in. The stench emanating from it was truly appalling. Clouds of evil-smelling dust would deter many visitors from coming to Howley for some years – and members endured these conditions very reluctantly. Not only that but the escape of methane gas from the vents to the side of our 13<sup>th</sup> could, at times, be quite nauseous. Fortunately, there is no problem now.

Probably in the 1960s, the windows of the old clubhouse were altered. The old mullioned windows were removed and the stone buried beneath the 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> tees.

### **The ‘Gobi Desert’**

Our 13<sup>th</sup> fairway, when the new 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> holes were purchased and added to the course, had very little topsoil on the surface, and it is little wonder that the fairway was known to all members as the ‘Gobi desert’, so dry and parched it became in the average summer. It required ‘preferred lies’ for a long time. Cracks appeared in the surface wide enough to swallow up many a golf ball.

Nevertheless, the 13<sup>th</sup> was quite a challenging par 5. The siting of the green, however, was a problem. Unfortunately, the second shot for long hitters, or the third shot (for most golfers), was a ‘blind’ shot, as the green nestled down in the depression alongside the present 14<sup>th</sup> green. It was presumably this defect which convinced the Greens Committee at the time to alter the configuration – short hole 14<sup>th</sup>, and long par 4 15<sup>th</sup> - its present form.

At one time, two small ponds were clearly a hazard, just where the new walled ditch now stands on the 13<sup>th</sup>, some 50 or 60 yards from the green. This new ditch, by the way, follows the old track into the Hall from Woodkirk church. The track goes behind the 11<sup>th</sup> green, across the 16<sup>th</sup> and into the north entrance of the Hall. The hedge alongside the track at the back of the 11<sup>th</sup> is quite ancient, most likely over four hundred years old.



### **'Plant a Tree in '73' - changing the nature of the course**

It was in 1973 that the committee revolutionised the look of this part of the course. Some 7500 Japanese larch were planted, thereby defining clearly the outline of holes 11-16.

Additionally, silver birch, cherry trees, some notable conifers, mountain ash, one or two copper beeches, a couple of horse chestnuts, elderberry and hawthorn hedging, together with the removal of gorse and heather, have altered the character of the course very markedly.

Thus, as these trees have matured over the years, Howley has gradually morphed from a moorland course to a parkland course. Quite clearly, many old photographs of the course in the early years of the nineteenth century show that there were hardly any trees on there at all.

### ***View from the 17<sup>th</sup> tee – not a tree in sight! (1930s)***

#### **14.**

Part of the alterations brought about another notable change; as stated, the 14<sup>th</sup> used to be a good par 4, and this was succeeded by a very testing par 3. Now we have a very well-designed 14<sup>th</sup>, and a long par 4 15<sup>th</sup>, two, or more, good shots to the green.



### **An Unwelcome Visitor**

(A couple of decades ago, a cross-country runner stopped at the side of the 14<sup>th</sup> green, just as two of our lady members were coming off the green. Promptly dropping his shorts, he proceeded to exhibit his wares to the two ladies. Without batting an eyelid, one of the ladies reached into the top of her golf bag, with serious intent to do this 'flasher' some memorable discomfort. Unfortunately, she took some time to make up her mind: she could n't decide whether a forceful 7 iron would do the job, or a controlled 6 iron – by which time, of course, the flasher had run away. During the weeks that followed, he made an appearance on several more occasions, but eventually discontinued his practices and has not been seen since, thankfully.)

The tee for this old 15<sup>th</sup> hole can be seen to the left of the fairway immediately to the left of what was the old 14<sup>th</sup> green – a shot of about 170 or so yards to our present 15<sup>th</sup> green.

## **15, 16, 17.**

Just talking about ‘making an appearance’, I will digress again, just to say that this area up to the ruins has frequently been the source of considerable ‘unease’. ‘Ghostly’ figures have been ‘seen’ on 15, 16 and 17, and noted for many years, and you can take with a huge pinch of salt, if you wish, all the stories of people in times past who say they have witnessed ‘something’ or ‘felt’ something. True to say, however, I have spoken with certain Howley members in recent years who have remarkable stories to tell of what they’ve seen, or ‘sensed’.

### **More Unwelcome Visitors**

During the 1990s, the 15<sup>th</sup>, particularly, was plagued with ‘visitors’; who roamed this area at will. The reason? Seeking ‘magic mushrooms’ – button-sized mushrooms that, when boiled – so I am informed! – used to give a halogenic experience. Men, women, even children, searched the fairway for these mushrooms, often presenting a hazard to golfers. Fortunately, the quality of the fairway grass improved in time, and these fungi disappeared, along with the visitors.

Leaving the tricky, sloping 15<sup>th</sup> green behind, we move on to what many regard as some of the best finishing holes in Yorkshire. The 16<sup>th</sup> tee is interesting in itself, especially for its panoramic views over Batley and beyond. (Who can forget the 1930s caustic comment of Mr Donald White, as he got off the train in Batley: ‘Good G....., do people actually live here?’ Southerners take time to adjust!

The view immediately down from the 16<sup>th</sup> tee is rough terrain, now liberally sporting numerous oak trees – the work of Howley member, Cliff Auty, who planted acorns round the area when he came up to the club thirty or more years ago. In the early days of Howley Hall, 1910 – 20, that area down to the signal box provided four holes, 11, 12, 13 and 14. The holes were still in use just over one hundred years ago, but were abandoned as being unsuitable. The practised eye can still detect the contour of a small green about 60 yards down to the right from our 16<sup>th</sup> tee.

Also just down to the right, you’ll see the Batley to Beeston line again. Because the track bends gracefully round as it weaves out of Batley, it’s a prime spot for photographers to take a full shot of loco and carriages. When the ‘Flying Scotsman’ made a celebratory journey on this line a few years ago, the rail embankment was thronged with amateur and professional train-spotter/photographers, seeking to catch that one special ‘shot’.

### **The Landscape Changes Again**

How things change! One of the biggest changes to the landscape, apart from the introduction of trees, was the gradual dilapidation of walls. Every field on the course had its stone wall – there was one across the 16<sup>th</sup> fairway, about a hundred yards from the tee; there was a wall up the left hand side of the fairway; there were walls all round the Hall; there was a wall at the back of the 17<sup>th</sup> green, a wall round the putting green, and so on – to name just a few that have disappeared in living memory. Older members will recall others. One reason for dismantling them was the risk to life and limb; if a ball rebounded on to a

player after it had been hit against one of these walls, the resulting injury could obviously be quite painful or worse. Sensible policy to reduce the risk of injury.

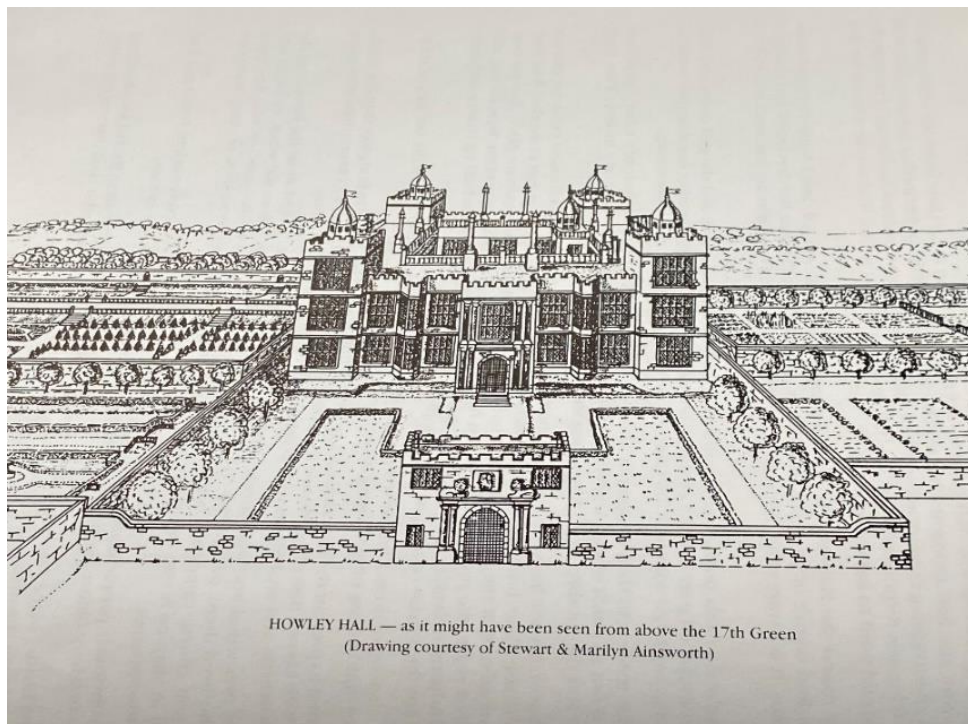
The 16th is a good par 5 - not over long but quite testing, with a deep ditch now guarding the front approach. Some hundred yards from the green, crossing the fairway, are two clear mounds. Four hundred years ago these were raised, balustraded walkways for the Savile family, owners of Howley Hall, to take a stroll across their parlour gardens. These gardens were mainly filled with rose bushes.

Contrary to some people's ideas, the cellars under the Hall do not extend this far. They certainly do not reach as far as Woodkirk, as some used to claim.

To complete the picture of the 16th, the green is on the area devoted to an orchard in the Hall's heyday; it was filled with extremely productive apricot trees, according to Norrisson Scatcherd in his 'History of Morley'.

The 17<sup>th</sup> (men's) tee borders the orchard. As you begin to walk fifty or so yards forward from the elevated tee, a thin line of silver birch trees set against the remnants of a wall hide what was the Hall's parlour garden. It had a little pond in the middle, and paths around, and the garden would have been full of flowers in its time. It was in this area that cannon balls were found, relics of the Royalist bombardment in 1643.

At about the length of an average senior member's drive, the last standing structures of what was once a most magnificent Hall can be seen to the left.



***Mr Stewart Ainsworth's re-creation of the Hall, as it might have been at the time of Lord John Savile, looking from above the bowling green (17<sup>th</sup> green).***

**HOWLEY HALL**

**Howley Hall** was intended to be the new home of Sir Robert Savile, a wealthy landowner from Lincolnshire. The year was 1585. Unfortunately, Robert died, and his son, **Sir John Savile**, inherited the estate. At the time Sir John was probably the richest person in Yorkshire, owning much of the land round Morley, Batley and Leeds, with income from such diverse sources as wool, coal, stone, iron and timber. He owned Kirkstall Forge. He was to become the 1<sup>st</sup> Alderman (Mayor) of Leeds, and, as Lord John Savile, MP for West Yorkshire, an extremely active member of Parliament. His coat of arms, incorporating an owl, is still present on the coat of arms of Leeds, and there are the remains of a stone owl carved into the clubhouse wall that can be seen from the 18<sup>th</sup> green.

To speak of the Hall itself, it was a magnificent edifice: ‘aedes elegantissimus’ – a most elegant building. 56 metres square, round a central courtyard, beautifully appointed. The famous Siegen-born artist, Peter Paul Rubens, was extremely impressed when he visited Howley in the first decade of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

A detailed ground plan of Howley Hall ruins, showing its relationship to the surrounding golf course. The plan includes several key features:

- Golf Course Features:** Clubhouse, 16th Fairway, 16th Green, Orchard, 17th Winter Tee, 17th Green, Bowling Green, Coach Route.
- Hall Ruins and Structures:** Gatehouse, West Entrance, Forecourt, Courtyard, Kitchen Garden, Above Surface Ruins, Privy Garden Pond, North Entrance, Cellars Under Mounds?, Ladies Tee.
- Dimensions:** Various measurements are provided throughout the plan, such as 9m, 6m, 56m, 25m, 40m, 86m, 15 X 1.3m, 9.5 X .7m, 9.5 X 1m, 3m, 64m, 52m, 40m, 56m, 25m, 40m, 56m.

The plan also includes a note at the bottom: "measurements derived from Mr Stewart Ainsworth's 1989 Field Study".

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For generations the cellars under the Hall have excited the curiosity of interested observers. At one time you could go down into these cellars – in fact, there have been tea dances held down there in the 1920s, and spiritualist visits – particularly to see the dungeon cells. In the 1940s, it was decided that the stonework was crumbling, and so the cellars were filled in. Nevertheless, if you are extremely careful, you can just see arches that used to frame the



cellars.

### ***Cellars of Howley Hall, 19<sup>th</sup> century***

The Hall was completed in 1590 at enormous cost. Lord John Savile lived there till his death in 1630. The estate then passed to his feckless son, Sir Thomas, Earl of Sussex. When the Civil War broke out in 1642, Sir Thomas seemed to have difficulty making up his mind which side to support. In fact, neither Royalists nor Parliamentarians trusted him. In the end, the Royalists jailed him.

Whilst the Earl was down with the king in the midlands, the Hall was occupied by the Parliamentarian, Sir John Savile, of Lupset, in

Wakefield. Another Sir John Savile! In May, 1643, Howley was used as the meeting place and assembly point for plotting an attack on Wakefield by the Parliamentarian army, led by Sir Thomas Fairfax, and his father, Lord Ferdinando.

With this encounter successfully achieved, and Wakefield gained, it was inevitable that reprisals would follow. With an army totalling more than 10,000 men, and two cannons, 'Gog' and 'Magog' – eight or nine-pounders – William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, decided, first, to besiege Howley, bombard it from Soothill (on the skyline behind the 17<sup>th</sup> tee), and then to storm it. Sir John held out for several days, though much of the cannon fire from Soothill was inaccurate and did minimal damage to the Hall. However, the Hall was taken by the Royalists, June 23, 1643, and Sir John taken prisoner to Newark. Only one person was killed – the gatekeeper.

The Hall was well plundered by the Royalist soldiers, and anything of value left the Hall. The army remained camped on our 17<sup>th</sup> fairway. Within ten days, however, the Duke led his army over our 16<sup>th</sup> fairway to Adwalton, three or four miles away, on the way to Bradford. There it met stiffer resistance at Adwalton Moor, Drighlington, but still managed to prevail against a much smaller Parliamentary army.

In brief, Thomas, now Viscount Saville and Earl of Sussex, was released from prison, returned to Howley after the war, and lived to 1661. With his second wife, the famously beautiful Anne (or Anna) Villiers; she is commemorated with 'Lady Anne Road', and 'Lady



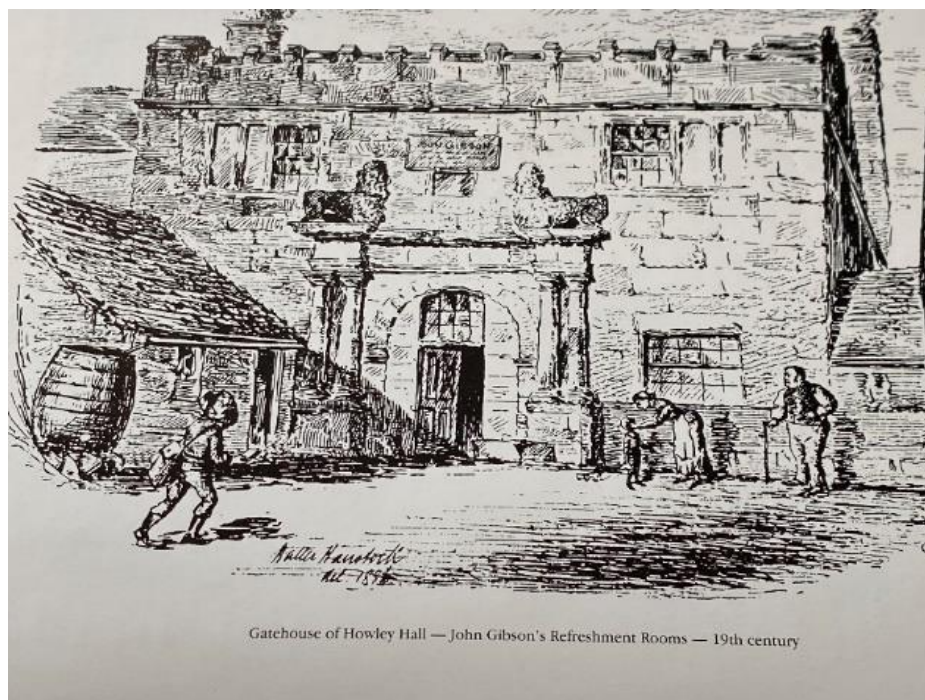
Anne Well' (no longer visible) down the hill from the kitchen gardens. They had two children, James and Frances. On Sir Thomas's death, the Hall and estate passed to his son, **James**. Unfortunately, James died in 1671, as did his son, also called James. In 1665, Lady Frances Savile had married Lord Francis Brudenell, the heir to the Earl of Cardigan. It was through Frances that Howley came to be attached to the earls of Cardigan for the next 250 years.

Just before we leave the 17<sup>th</sup> hole, one or two more points of interest come to mind. Having fallen into disrepair, when Lord and Lady Brudenell chose to live at his ancestral home in the south, the Hall was let to tenants, but proved too expensive to maintain. Somewhere between 1717 and 1730, the Hall was blown up with gunpowder on the orders of an agent of the Earl of Cardigan, who now owned the estate. (It was not blown up by Cromwell!)

For the next two or three hundred years, the beautifully cut stone was fair game for anyone wishing to build their own property, and a number of houses in Batley and Bradford were constructed using Howley Hall stone.

### **The Gatehouse**

The gatehouse remained intact, however, and during the 19<sup>th</sup> century became popular as a Tea Room. In fact, the Howley ruins became a Sunday attraction for many people from Batley and the surrounding area. There is just a small mound of stone left to be seen. (The area also attracted individuals with less savoury ambitions; they came to be known as the 'owley oglers'! Don't ask me to explain!)



***The Gatehouse (the Lodge) Howley Hall, 19<sup>th</sup> century. A Mr Janson ran it as a Tea Room – later it was taken over by John Gibson***



***Painting showing the ruins in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century***



***Postcards from 1904 and 1909 showing the deterioration of the ruins***



### **‘Thiepval Wood’**

As you walk the 17<sup>th</sup> fairway, to the left, you can see two engraved stones; these two stones have been embedded in what used to be the side of the ladies’ 17th tee. The words ‘Thiepval Wood’, and an arrow, can faintly be deciphered on one of the stones. It seems that the standing ruins of the Hall reminded some First World War soldier of the horrific devastation that took place at Thiepval. Thanks to the diligent pursuit of this project by Mr Paul Monaghan, the other stone now commemorates those who have died in battle through the years - a fitting memorial.

*Extant ruins of the kitchens on the south east corner of the Hall*



### **The ‘Scheduling’ of the Ruins**

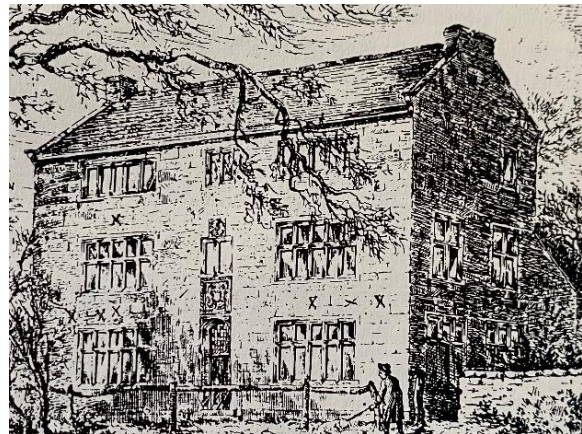
The other point worth mentioning is that the ruins are very special! Well, the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England think so. They made a report of the area, through the interest of Mr Stewart Ainsworth, working on behalf of the RCHME. This report moved the Secretary of State to designate **Howley Hall a ‘Scheduled Monument’**, thereby preserving what is left of the Hall and its environs to remain untouched – by law. The fact that, from time to time, we still experience young motorbike ‘enthusiasts’ bombing round the far side of the ruins (the kitchen gardens) is another matter.

Mentioning the far side of the ruins reminds me that, in the 1860s, to the end of the century, men played knur and spell there – a game more popular than cricket at the time. It is reported that some drives were struck over two hundred yards – a remarkable distance with the equipment then available.

### **18.**

We leave the bowling green, our 17th green, and take the short walk to the 18th tee. A spectacular panorama lies before us. This 18th has to be one of the best closing holes in Yorkshire. Two hundred yards to a well-guarded green, out of bounds to the far left, with uncertain winds swirling round, and the glass windows of the clubhouse uncomfortably close!

Incidentally, speaking of Howley's exposed position, the word 'howley' means the 'field on the hill' - the word has nothing to do with the sound the wind makes there.



***The Bailiff's house pre-1886, three storeys high***

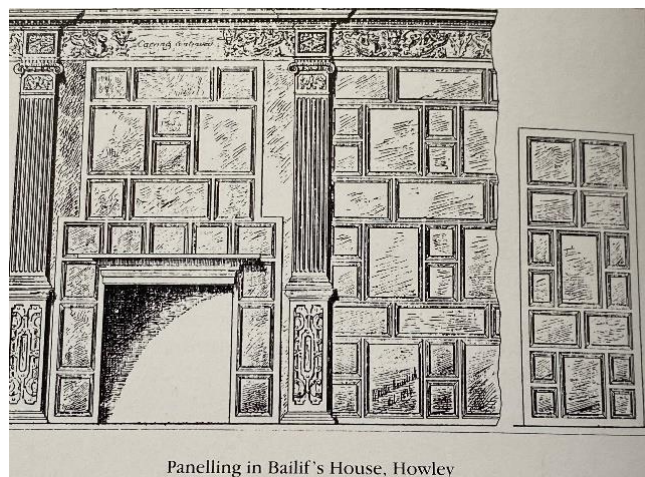
### ***The Bailiff's House - the clubhouse - post 1886***

#### **The Bailiff's House**

The Savile coat of arms can be seen in the photograph above the door; it bore the motto: 'Be fast' – meaning 'Be resolute or determined'. It is not known where this crest disappeared, or when. Notice the mullion windows and the soot-blackened stonework.

Safely, eventually, on the green, one-time croquet lawn, we are in full view of all the members in the clubhouse. Beyond the green is a remarkable building. It was the 15<sup>th</sup> century home of the Mirfield family - Isabella and Oliver Mirfield were living here in 1488. It was the house tenanted by the Bailiff to Lord John Savile in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, an alehouse in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, Mr Whitaker's house in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and, from the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a golf clubhouse.

In 1886, the third storey was removed, and in 1919, the beautiful oak panelling, in what was then the club kitchen, was removed and relocated, where it now resides, in the Oak Room at Deene Park, Northamptonshire.



***The oak panelling, formerly in the kitchen of the clubhouse, now at Deene Park, Northamptonshire***

Panelling in Bailiff's House, Howley



*Ladies and Gentlemen – members  
circa 1912*

### **Countess Adeline, the Earls of Cardigan and the Brudenells.**

On a rare visit to Howley Hall, the extravagant, eccentric Countess Adeline, the widow of James Brudenell, 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Cardigan – the man who led the ‘Charge of the Light Brigade’ (25<sup>th</sup> October 1854) came ‘up north’ to visit her property in Yorkshire. She was so taken by the oak panelling that she decided she would have it in her Deene Park palace. It is in the ‘Oak Room’ at Deene Park, Northamptonshire, to the present day. (I’ve seen it – it is very impressive). As the owners still of Howley Hall at the time, the Cardigans could help themselves!

In the 1990s, I invited Edmund Brudenell, and the Hon. Marion, relatives of the Earl of Cardigan, to visit Howley, seeing as the family still own quite a bit of Batley, Ardsley and Leeds. We toured the ruins, and they were most impressed to see what had happened to ‘their’ property over 300 years.

### **The Clubhouse**

As one might expect, through the years, Howley Hall clubhouse has had more than its fair share of alterations to the layout and fabric of the building. In recent times, the frontage overlooking the 18<sup>th</sup> green has had two major renovations, the first in June, 1967, and the second, a new lounge bar (May, 1989) and altered frontage, as you see it today. Special praise for this latter change goes to Howley Hall members, John Squires and Bobby Topham.

Similarly, Board member at the time, Frank Eastwood, was largely instrumental in promoting interior alterations to the clubhouse, and external features on the east side – the ‘Street’, the pro’s shop, Spike (or Stud) bar and locker rooms – to name just some of the alterations for the club’s centenary in 2000. Today, the clubhouse is well and truly ‘fit for purpose’, though further improvements are in the pipeline. It affords the facilities of a modern clubhouse for members as well as visitors. It also has the capacity to hold social events for visiting parties.

In conclusion, as we finish our round at Howley Hall, the purchase of the course and clubhouse from the Earl of Cardigan for the princely sum of £4250 in 1925 seems a good return for the money. Thus ended a liaison that had been in operation for 325 years.





*Stephen Spinks'  
Pro Shop before  
the 2000 changes*

*Putting Green,  
Elizabethan  
Planter and Rear  
of Clubhouse  
Today (March  
2022)*



## Recent Years



***Howley Hall Clubhouse today (March 2022)***

If you've read so far, keep going; there's just a little more! It would be remiss, however, not to make a passing reference to the changes that have taken place in recent years.

Perhaps it is well to state, also, that the impact of coronavirus for the past two years cannot be overstated. The 'lockdown', and the closing of the clubhouse, social distancing, hand-sanitising, the wearing of masks since March 2020, put almost intolerable strains on some people and on some businesses. To their credit, the staff of Howley Hall and members pulled together and successfully weathered the effects of the pandemic.

Just a couple more points to observe regarding the changing 'character' of the course. We've mentioned the addition of trees in the 1970s, and the thinning out of trees in the past couple of years. We've noted also the gradual disappearance of walls around the course.

Two other features about the history of the Howley Hall course need a passing reference – the rough and the bunkers. Radical changes to these two features have had quite an impact.

Over time, the trend has been to remove the rough from anywhere near the playing area. Probably motivated by the need to speed up play, gone is the knee-high, ball-gathering rough that golfers would spend the obligatory maximum five minutes (now three minutes),

seeking lost balls. Strimming under the trees has also had an impact on pace of play. Now fairways, semi-rough and rough are all carefully gauged to meet international standards.

If cutting back areas of thick rough have helped ease pressure on golfers, there has been a move in the opposite direction, to toughen up the course – a far-reaching and significant programme of new and re-constructed bunkers. These fairway bunkers and greenside bunkers are quite different from the previous generation; they are now, generally, deeper and more aesthetically contoured, designed, specifically and carefully, to catch the wayward shot.

The new fairway bunkers appear to have been sited to accommodate the increased hitting length of even average drivers of a ball. But play into one of these bunkers almost inevitably risks losing one shot. On the other hand, there is little relief, either, from the greenside bunkers. Though more consistent in the composition of the sand surface than hitherto, they do present a major challenge to the skill of most golfers to deal with them satisfactorily.

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Future readers may wish to know how the management of a club and course has kept pace with modern influences. Apologies for now covering ground which most golfers will know already.

The greatest change by far has been the shift from ‘amateur’ to ‘professional’. On the course the greenkeeping staff are professionals, with professional, specialist knowledge. They are thoroughly trained through the agency of BIGGA – the British & International Golf Greenkeepers’ Association.

The Greens’ staff have to have the knowledge and skills to handle most technological advances, as well as biological, ecological and botanical issues – the machinery used, the correct application of water resources, wetting agents, herbicides, pesticides and awareness of environmental concerns. In addition to providing specialist knowledge of a whole host of other subjects – grade of bunker sand, growth rates of grass and types of grass, tree pruning, lopping and surgery, weather and climate changes, to itemise just a few areas of skill required, they have to have good management and communication skills. The practical application of these functions is no longer the province of one man and his dog; it is a highly skilled occupation.

On all these matters, Howley Hall has definitely moved to keep pace with what is required of a first class golf course today.

Similarly, the Administration of the club, Catering, Bar Stewardship, organisation and running of the Professional shop, all are in the hands of professional members of staff, and overseen by the President and members of the Board of Directors. In every aspect of club management, Howley Hall has become an extremely professional unit. It has to be; a golf club is a big concern. There have to be people who are thoroughly familiar with such demands as Health & Safety issues, Equality and Child Protection legislation, business and general legal matters, to say nothing of how to run a business. The club today is, indeed,

very fortunate to have the professional capacity to deal with almost every matter affecting performance.

## **Howley Members**

So much for this brief history. But history is interesting mainly when it concerns people, and it is their contribution to the story that makes it worthwhile.

It's the story of people like Sir William Middlebrook, Jim Stockdale, Ronnie Gaunt (and Mildred – when Mildred said that a Rule was such and such, no lady dared disagree!). Bring to mind, also, the daunting figure of long-term President, Clifford Newsome, former secretary, Audrey Pepper, Joan Morton (!), and former professional, Stephen Spinks, to say nothing of the irascible, unforgettable Kenny Shoemith, whose daily nourishment at the bar used to help keep Howley Hall solvent.

Other names come to mind:, Geoff Tolson, Ray Smith, Paul Carrigill, Becky O'Grady (first lady member of the Board of Directors) Marcus Armitage, European Tour winner, as, also, Daniel Gavins; and the irrepressible, infectious humour of Bob Avison, who, as resident Quizmaster, has entertained Howley members and visitors for a decade or more. And , talking of entertainmennt, Patti Gold and Stuart Atkins; they have been wonderful entertainers for quite some years for Howley audiences. (I can still picture Patti singing 'I feel pretty' - only to lift her long skirt a little to reveal lovely shiny wellies!)

Nor do people forget the efforts made to raise money for the 'Children in Need' Charity and other charities. where not inconsiderable amounts of money have been raised mainly through the enthusiasm and commitment of members David Jones and John Winn over the past ten or more years.. You cannot walk the fairways (and rough!) of Howley Hall and then step into the clubhouse, or Ryan Rastall's well-stocked pro shop, without casting a thought to the people who have made, and continue to make, its ongoing history.

Obviously, not all members can be named here, and there are many more ladies and gentlemen who have given years of service to the benefit of the club, and we can only appreciate all they have done.

To bring this brief history to a conclusion, then, Howley Hall is not merely a golf club but a constantly changing and evolving community, with its origins dating back over four hundred years. Next time you play Howley Hall golf course, or visit the clubhouse, it's worth giving a thought to its remarkable history.

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The above account is notable more for what is omitted than for what has been written about. More detailed information can be found in other works. See below.

Jay Whittam

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**FOR FURTHER READING:**

Norrisson Scatcherd – 1830 or 1870 – ‘A History of Morley’

George Wood - ‘The Story of Morley’

William Smith – ‘Old Yorkshire’

Jay Whittam – 1993 – ‘Howley Hall and the Golf Club’

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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Modern Photography by Jay Whittam, with kind permission of the Board of Directors.