

A golfer's guide to... Colt's hidden gems

Harry Colt was probably involved in the design and upgrade of more famous championship courses than any other architect. But, as Rob Smith explains, his legacy includes many other wonderful creations that aren't quite so well known...



Trademark Colt bunkering
at Stoke Park



There's plenty of sand
to avoid at Tandridge



Bath Golf Club's
360-yard par-4 8th



Northamptonshire County offers
a varied and enjoyable test

A quick glance at the latest *Golf Monthly* Top 100 Courses in UK and Ireland rankings reveals that Harry Shapland Colt, whether as the original architect or as a remodeller, has had more of an influence on today's golfing landscape than anyone else. From classic links such as Muirfield, Royal Portrush and Rye, to healthland gems such as Sunningdale New, St George's Hill and Swinley Forest, his bequest and influence on today's architects is unparalleled.

He was also prolific, and his enthusiasm and energy enabled him to contribute to many wonderful courses that are not quite so well known. It would take pages and pages of this magazine to do justice to Harry Colt, so for

now, let's take a short east to west look at a handful of his grand designs that are not currently in our Top 100.

TANDRIDGE par 71, 6,395 yards

Opened in 1924, this beautiful parkland course near Oxted in Surrey has two distinctly different nines. Back then, it was described in *The Times* as being "on a grand, bold scale, eminently fair, but devilishly ingenious". Said to have been blessed, or indeed cursed, with more than 300 bunkers, many were removed over the years. That aside, the design has remained largely unchanged. Quite recently, however, the club has invested in a substantial three-year upgrade overseen by Dutch architect and Colt expert, Frank Pont.



- 1 Tandridge 2 Stoke Park
- 3 Northamptonshire County 4 Bath
- 5 Southerndown

The ethos has been to use Colt's design principles and philosophies, but aligned with modern golfing technology and tastes. The bunkering, in particular, is dramatically bolder, offering new strategic challenges and visual splendour. There are some new tees, and the course is a little longer, with the 1st and 9th both now par 5s for all. In essence, there's been an improvement to the playing characteristics and enjoyment of every hole, and the spectacular 14th is now challenged for the accolade of signature hole by the creation of new tees at the 18th. Backed by superb catering and the warmest welcome in the characterful clubhouse, this Colt jewel is a must-play.

STOKE PARK Colt/Alison: par 71, 6,751 yards
Lane Jackson: par 36, 3,089 yards

Gaining worldwide attention as the location for the golf match that takes place in the 1964 James Bond film *Goldfinger*, Stoke Park, which at the time was known as Stoke Poges, and its beautiful listed clubhouse was run by the local council.

The Buckinghamshire estate was originally landscaped by Capability Brown, and was purchased by Nick Lane Jackson, the founder of the Corinthian Sporting Club, with the objective of creating Britain's first country club. He brought in Colt, whose design was soon used to host the PGA Matchplay tournament.

Perhaps the course's most celebrated hole is the par-3 7th. One of Colt's collaborators, Alister MacKenzie, used the design as inspiration for his 12th at Augusta, one of the most famous short holes in the world. Rather than heather, of which there is none, the real feature of the course is the many magnificent specimen trees that line the fairways.

The club is host to the annual Colt Cup, an event featuring teams of three from many of his designs in the UK and further afield, and the course is kept in immaculate condition. The Lane Jackson nine offers a contrasting loop, and Stoke Park now has a 49-bedroom luxury hotel with superb dining and various sports and leisure facilities, including a spa, gym and tennis.

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNTY par 70, 6,721 yards

While much of Harry Colt's heathery handiwork is close to London, there are plenty of fine examples in slightly more rural locations, such as the lovely village of Church Brampton in Northamptonshire.

The club would probably be more widely known were it not a little off the beaten track. It celebrated its centenary in 2009 having previously undergone an upgrade under the guidance of Cameron Sinclair. With only one starting point, a stretch of three new holes was opened in 2004, offering a route back to the clubhouse for those wishing to play just nine. The club also has an entertaining six-hole par-3 course, which is named after the original great architect.

On the main course, heather and gorse combine with mature trees and some gentle undulations to



A recent upgrade at Tandrige included new tees and bunkering

COURSE GUIDE

Tandrige
T: 01883 712274
W: tandridgegolfclub.com
GF: £73wd per day (reduced rates after noon)

Stoke Park
T: 01753 717171
W: stokepark.com
GF: £145wd per round, £205we per round

Northamptonshire County
T: 01604 843025
W: countygolfclub.org.uk
GF: £70 per round, £80 per day all week

Bath
T: 01225 466953
W: bathgolfclub.org.uk
GF: £36wd per round, £54 per day, £40/£60we

Southerndown
T: 01656 880476
W: southerndowngolfclub.com
GF: £55wd per round, £80 per day, £75/£105we

provide a varied and greatly enjoyable test, which includes five holes on the other side of a railway line. Despite its quiet location, the club is only a few minutes from the M1, and certainly worth seeking out.

BATH par 71, 6,505 yards

The excellent course at Sham Castle typifies the term 'undiscovered gem', as it is unassuming, largely unheralded and comparatively unknown. Despite, and perhaps in some ways because of that, it's a friendly place with a lovely course that's great fun from your initial blows up the hill, to the welcoming

descent back down the 18th to the clubhouse.

It's situated just outside the historic city, high up on Bathampton Down, which means there are panoramic views down over Bath and across the Avon Valley. Wind is a regular feature and, depending on the direction and speed, it can often make some of the two-shotters, such as the 5th and the 13th, into three-shotters.

Unusually, there are only three short holes, the best being the 14th, which requires a brave carry over an ancient quarry. To make up for this, there are several par 4s that offer birdie opportunities, the most memorable being the unusual 17th. This short dogleg to the right has a beautifully maintained drystone wall marking the boundary of the course, which acts as a magnet to many golfers. A hidden gem that deserves to be found.



Imposing: panoramic views abound at Bath

SOUTHERNDOWN par 70, 6,428 yards

One sign of a great golf architect is that the course appears as natural and as untouched by human hand as possible; that it blends in seamlessly with its surroundings. This can most certainly be said of Southerndown, near Bridgend in South Wales, which is an unusual and eclectic combination of links, downland and clifftop rolled into one.

It's a timeless classic where you could easily imagine that you have stepped back into the early 1920s, when Colt refined and modified the earlier creativity of Willie Fernie, Herbert Fowler and Willie Park. Although it's not long by modern standards, there's no need for it to be. Gorse, bracken, sea winds and pot bunkers all play their part in protecting the course, and there's ample compensation in the constant views, near and far.

Some of the rough is 'managed' by the resident sheep, and there are frequent changes in direction and gentle undulations, which offer variety from start to finish. The feature hole is the closing par 4 back down to the clubhouse. Straight hitting is required if you're to make the large green in regulation. All in all, it's a unique track.

Such is Colt's legacy, that for each course mentioned above, there are many other secrets worth sharing. Some are recognised as exclusively Colt, others are his redesigns or upgrades, and yet others feature tweaks and minor modifications that are still the work of his creative genius. A handful of courses (in alphabetical order) that I can recommend from personal experience begins with Alnmouth and continues with Blackmoor, Brancepeth Castle, Broadstone, Came Down, Canterbury and Copt Heath. The list, like Colt's legacy to golf around the world, goes on and on. **GM**



Mature trees mark out Stoke Park



Sweeping views at Southerndown



The 12th green at Northamptonshire County



LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

The inside track from those in the know



STAY

Macdonald Berystede Hotel & Spa, Ascot

T: 0844 879 9104

W: macdonaldhotels.co.uk

Not far from Stoke Park, and within easy reach of Tandridge, this hotel is ideally suited to hosting golfers. It has 126 individually styled bedrooms, an AA rosette restaurant with roof terrace, plus leisure club and spa.

The Fairways Hotel, Porthcawl

T: 01656 782085

W: thefairwayshotel.co.uk

This seaside hotel is not far from Southerndown and has panoramic views over the Bristol Channel. The rooms have been recently refurbished, and another Colt masterpiece, Royal Porthcawl, is only a minute up the road.



EAT

The Red Lion, East Haddon, Northamptonshire

T: 01604 770223

W: redlioneasthaddon.co.uk

Peter Walsh, the manager at Northants County, recommends this award-winning country pub and hotel just a few minutes' drive from the club. The restaurant has a 'Bib Gourmand' from the Michelin Guide, and there are seven bedrooms, as well as a two-bedroom cottage.



DRINK

The Bell, Godstone

T: 01883 743216

W: thebellgodstone.co.uk

Many members at Tandridge enjoy this informal dining pub, just five minutes from the M25. There's a frequently changing menu, and it's just as easy to pop in for a quick pint as it is to make the visit a real occasion.

The George Inn, Norton St Philip, near Bath

T: 01373 834224

W: georgeinnsp.co.uk

A beautiful 700-year-old Grade 1-listed inn with wooden beams, antique furniture and cosy bars. There are plenty of real ales, as well as a varied menu of local fare and character accommodation.