

John Frederick Seager 1896 – 1959

Professional at Rothley Park from March 17th 1922 until his death in October 1959

Early Life

- Born in 1896 in Bedford, his father John Seager (B.1865) was professional and Head Greenkeeper at Bedford Golf Club
- His brother Lewis Seager was born two years later in 1898
- In 1911 Jack joined the greens staff at Bedford Golf Club
- As a 16 year old in 1912, whilst still an amateur, he attained a handicap of scratch
- In February 1914 he moved to South Staffs Golf Club as greenkeeper and assistant Professional

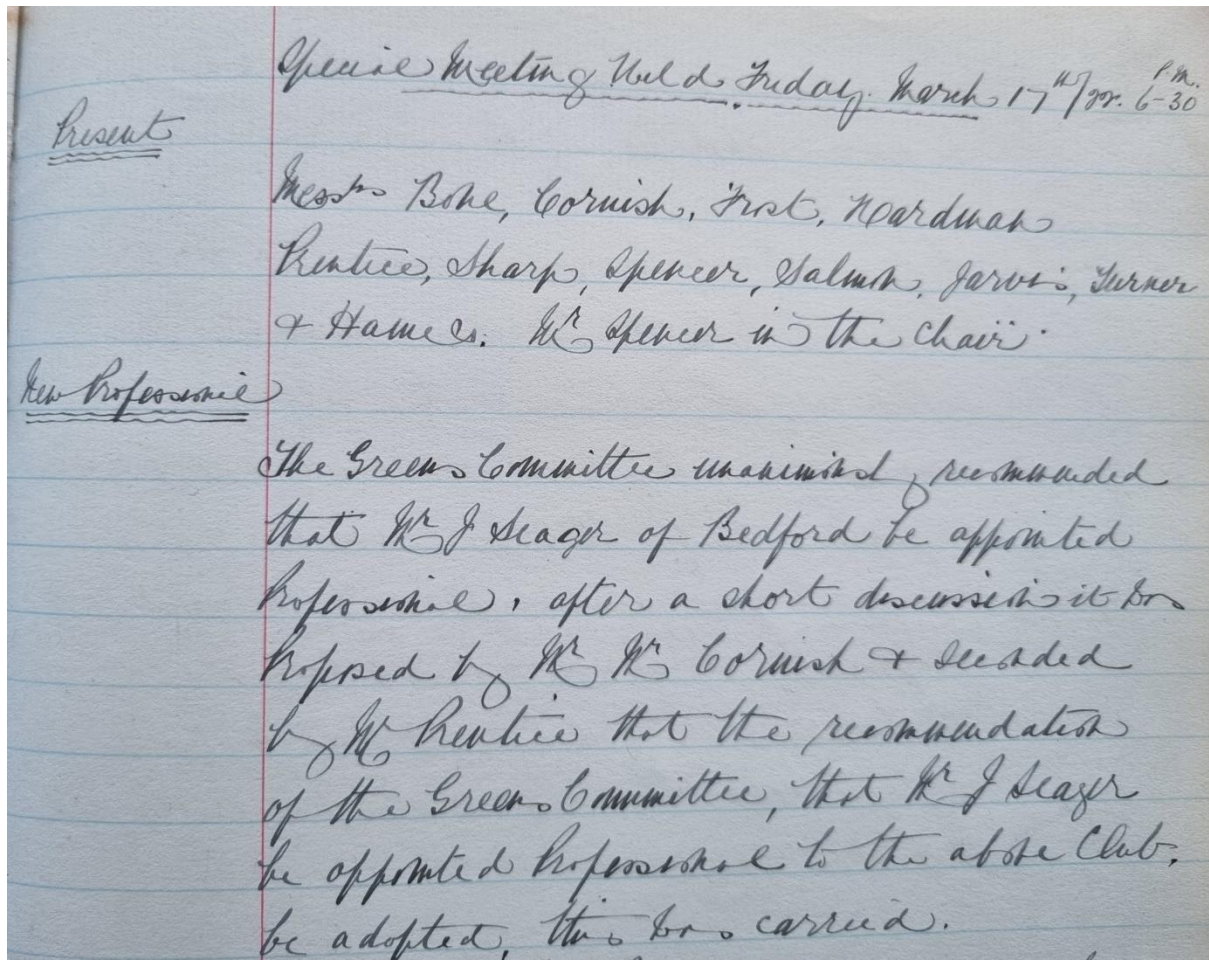
War Hero

Jack signed up for duty as a signaller in the First World War. One night, whilst on duty re-establishing communication lines in “no man’s land,” he came upon a wounded officer whereupon, under fire, he carried the officer back to safety and returned to his duties without revealing his identity to the wounded officer’s troop. After a lengthy investigation Jack Seager was identified and received the Military Medal for gallantry.

Jack Seager (Left) and his brother Lewis Seager (Right)



After the First World War, Jack worked for 18 months at St. Neots Golf Club but returned to Bedford Golf Club as Professional in 1920. One of his pupils was a teenage Henry Longhurst, who later came to fame as a golf writer and broadcaster.



As the entry above in the Council Minute Book shows, Jack Seager was appointed as professional to Rothley Park Golf Club, 100 years ago, on Friday March 17th 1922, at a wage of 45 shillings per week.

Lewis (Lou) Seager

Golfing talent obviously ran in the Seager family. Jack's younger brother Lou, having only played golf at Bedford as a junior, moved up to Lancashire at the age of 34. He decided to take up golf again off a handicap of 18. Two years later he had a handicap of scratch. He subsequently played for Lancashire, became County Captain and held the course record of 68 at his home club of West Derby in Liverpool.

Troon Golf Club



The following year in June 1923 Jack Seager travelled to Troon Golf Club (not yet Royal Troon) in Scotland for his first attempt at qualifying for the Open Championship. At that time there were no exemptions and even the previous year's winner had to prequalify.

Qualifying rounds were played on the Monday and Tuesday of Open week with the championship proper played over 36 holes on the Thursday and 36 holes on the Friday. This allowed the club professionals to return to their clubs to serve their members over the weekend.

Jack Seager qualified with rounds of 77 and 82 (Gene Sarazen failed to qualify) and finished 82nd with a four round total of 329.

Open Championship Record

Qualified for the Open 10 times between 1923 and 1946

- 1923 - 82nd at Troon
- 1924 – 59th at Hoylake
- 1928 – Missed the cut at Royal St.Georges
- 1929 – Missed the cut at Muirfield
- 1931 – 60th at Carnoustie
- 1936 – Missed the cut at Hoylake
- 1937 – 47th at Carnoustie
- 1938 – Missed the cut at Royal St.Georges
- 1939 – Missed the cut at St.Andrews
- 1946 – Missed the cut at St.Andrews

Midland Counties Professional Challenge Cup

Jack first won this prestigious title in 1925 and was twice runner up subsequently. However, his "proudest moment in golf," came when he won the title for a second time in 1950, at the age of 54 at Woodhall Spa Golf Club with rounds of 75 and 71 in conditions which Jack described thus, "we played under bad conditions, snow and a gale."



Pictured here are the Green family (no relation to our Men's Captain). When Jack first joined Rothley Park in 1922, George and Agnes Green were steward and stewardess at the club.



Their daughter Gladys (pictured on the left of the photo) later married Jack on the 26th of February 1930. They had two children Jack (1931) and Anne (1934).

Jack Seager – Ryder Cup Trial

At the beginning of 1931 Jack Seager was in the form of his life. The previous year he had lost in a playoff for the Midland Professional title at Birstall. He had beaten Open winner George Duncan in the Oxhay Professional Tournament as well as breaking the course record at Rothley with a round of 65.

He was quoted in the newspapers as a “probable” member of the 1931 Ryder Cup side who would play the USA in Ohio in the June of that year. Seager was selected for a Ryder Cup trial at Sandwell Park in February 1931. In the morning he scored 75 and in the afternoon he teamed up with Len Holland (Gerrards Cross Golf Club) in a foursomes match which they won 4&3. Unfortunately, this obviously wasn't enough to impress the selectors as neither of them were chosen for the eventual team. The USA went on to win the 1931 Ryder Cup by 9 points to 3.

Leicestershire & Rutland PGA Trophy

In the space of 30 years Jack Seager won the County Professional Championship five times. 1926, 1941(played over a shortened Rothley park course of 16 holes), 1949, 1951 and finally, at the age of 60, 1956 at Rothley Park with scores of 73 and 72.

Jack Seager - Clubmaker



As well as travelling round the country playing top class professional tournaments, Jack Seager also had many other functions to perform.

- Giving lessons to members
- Making and repairing clubs for members
- Stocking and running his shop
- In charge of the green staff. During the war when several holes were taken over for food production, Jack was in charge of the agricultural production
- He also had a hand in designing changes to Glen Gorse and Scraftoft Golf Clubs

Such was his expertise at club making that he won a national competition, which was held at Sandwich Golf Club in 1928.

Jack Seager was club professional at Rothley Park from 1922 until his death in 1959. As well as being a first class golfer he was held in the highest regard by members. Please see below an obituary, written by Henry Longhurst, in the Evening Standard which eloquently sums up the life and times of Jack Seager.



Obituary
The Evening Standard
October 1959

SERVANT OF THE GAME *by HENRY LONGHURST*

THOUGH the game of golf can be embarked upon at any age up to about eighty, there are many advantages in beginning as a boy, not merely because you enjoy it for a lifetime instead of for a few years or because you become more expert at it but also because, in my own experience at least, it leaves you with sharper and more poignant boyhood memories than any other game. Many of these have come surging back to me as I learn the sad news of the death of Jack Seager.

Seager was professional to my home club at Bedford, as his father had been before him, when I began the game soon after the first war and my three lessons a week with him were the highlights of the holidays. When he suddenly left to go to the Rothley Park club at Leicester, I felt—though in fact his successor, W. J. Moore, in turn became a lifelong friend—that the bottom had dropped out of my little world. ¶

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WHAT Bedford lost, however, Leicester gained, for their new professional was to serve them with distinction for more than 30 years, a true servant of the club and an ideal example of what one may perhaps call the old fashioned club professional.

The game itself seems to have been almost old fashioned as one looks back over the years, but it remain in no doubt that in quality it was superior. The thrill of adding a single new club to one's set for seven and sixpence ex-

ceeded that of later buying a whole battery of nine numbered irons for £40.

¶ The combined aroma of leather, twine, shavings, boiling glue and the bunsen burner in Seager's shop comes back to me as I write and I see again the small boy, promised a new driver for Christmas, watching him select the shaft and the block and hanging around the shop each day as the club took shape, until at last the twine was knotted on the grip—a secret which I have not grasped to this day—and the final work of art was carried proudly to the first tee.

* * *

ALMOST every professional made his own clubs in those days. Yet when one of the British players in a Walker Cup match in America not so long ago broke the shaft of one of his clubs, not one of the six assistants in the pro's shop, which resembled a Bond Street store, could fit a new shaft and the club had to be sent back to the factory!

Only those who started with hickory can appreciate how much of the artistry of golf vanished with the advent of the steel shaft—or for that matter how bad a really bad hickory shaft could be. It was not so much that the good shots were any better with hickory than with steel but that the bad shots, due probably to the torsion in wood, were ten times as bad. My outstanding first impression of steel was that a shot

which with hickory would have gone nowhere may well have stung the fingers but did at least go somewhere.

Am I right, I wonder, in thinking that hickory led to great swingers rather than great hitters? Cyril Tolley and Joyce Wethered, who were approaching their heyday when I began, are examples that come to mind. Perhaps it was only hero worship but I always used to think that Jack Seager had the most divinely rhythmical swing. "Sometimes in the course of a lesson he would seize one of my juvenile clubs and hit a shot with it himself. It seemed to be the very poetry of motion and I gazed with awe at the vast distance which with such apparent nonchalance the ball could be hit." ¶

* * *

I WONDER, too, whether the teaching of golf was then the exact science which fashionable instructors, though still speaking with many voices, make of it today? Seager's instruction was simple. You opened the face of the club on the way back and closed it on the way down. I suppose he was, in today's parlance, one of the "rollers" rather than one of the "squares" and his doctrine might at the moment come under suspicion. To me, however, his word was gospel and if occasionally when he wasn't looking I forgot the overlapping grip and caught hold of the club in nature's way, well, boys will be boys.

Thanks to Jack's Grandson, David Seager for supplying photographs and biographical background.