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Newsletter and Book Review for the Serious Collector

Royal Blackheath Golf Club

Royal Blackheath has the distinction of being the oldest golf club in the world, having been instituted in 1608. Blackheath is an area in southeast London, centered around a section of open public grassland ('the Heath') and straddling the boundary of the London Borough of Lewisham and the London Borough of Greenwich.



William Innes, Captain of Royal Blackheath in 1778

The club's first course consisted of just five holes on Blackheath itself, with three circuits, that is, 15 holes constituting a round. The course was extended to seven holes in 1844. The club departed the Heath in 1923, merging with Eltham Golf Club some three miles away. An important distinction to note is that Blackheath does not lay claim to being the oldest course (that would be the Old Course at St. Andrews), simply the oldest club.

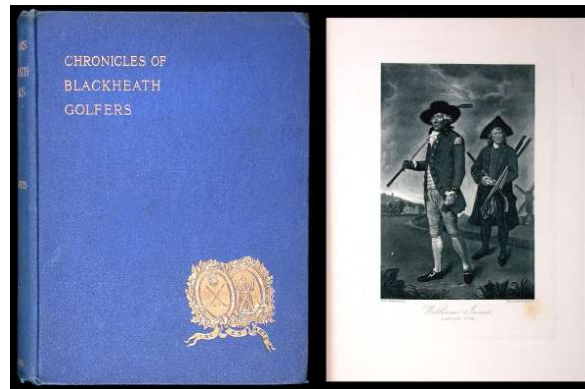
It's amazing to think that a golf club can celebrate its 400th anniversary, which is precisely what Royal Blackheath is doing. To commemorate this milestone a newly published book *400 Years of the Blackheath Goffer 1608-2008* has just been published in a limited edition of 400 copies: 100 of the Subscriber's Edition and 300 of the Club Edition.

The book is edited by Neil Scaife and designed by John Nash. It has more than 450 images and runs 224 pages. Clubs in the U.K. are bestowed a 'royal' designation by a patron. In the case of Royal Blackheath, the patron is HRH Prince Andrew, the Duke of York. The Club Edition are signed by the author and the Subscriber's Edition are signed by the author, the Royal Blackheath Captain and the Field Marshal.

We recommend this book highly as it is an important club in the history of the game and the quality of its production is stunning. The quality and layout of the illustrations in the

book is second to none and takes full advantage of the rich history of this important golf club. The book has a chapter title “The Club’s Treasures” which is quite something. Only a handful of golf clubs can offer such a rich set of paintings, medals, trophies, clubs, jackets, books and illustrations spanning four centuries.

Previously, there were two other books published about Royal Blackheath: *Chronicles of Blackheath Golfers with Illustrations and Portraits* was the first book written about Royal Blackheath. It was edited by W.E. Hughes and published in 1897 by Chapman and Hall. This book is the first known club history and is rare. The book consists primarily of notes and minutes from the club’s record books.



Royal Blackheath was published in 1981 and written by Ian T. Henderson and David I. Stirk. It was published in three editions. A limited edition of 100 issued in gilt stamped leather and a slipcase. Each of these copies of the book is signed. The book was simultaneously issued in a standard trade edition with a dust jacket. A second revised edition was published in 1995.

What was it like playing the original Blackheath course in London? Horace Hutchinson writing in *Golf: The Badminton Library* in 1894 gives this brilliant description of the original course at Blackheath: “Long powerful driving, and strength in jerking from heavy lies, are the main requisites for success at Blackheath, of which, as of Wimbledon, it may be said that it is a wonderful substitute for golf so near to London, and so surrounded by houses. At Blackheath, the historic, flinty links you are allowed to play every day of the week; but golf is practically given over on Saturday afternoons in favour of the winter footballers and summer cricketers. Blackheath, moreover, is the only links on which you habitually play with a fore-caddy, who runs ahead with a red flag, as if you were a traction engine, to scare away the nursemaids and to see that your ball is not stolen by a boys’ school. In addition to these living hazards, the chief obstacles are lamp-posts, wooden seats, and roads, and footpaths.”