Foxhills,
a potted history

Originally owned by Chertsey Abbey in the Middle Ages, Foxhills was really put on the map in the 18th-century with the arrival of Charles James Fox, the brilliant but mercurial politician, after whom the club is named.

Fox was expelled from Eton, according to his headmaster, for being "too wicked and a little too witty". He followed his father into politics as MP for Midhurst aged just 19. His talent for oratory was matched only by his appetites for gambling and the high life. He once made a wager with the Prince Regent on the number of cats they would see on Bond Street. He later went on to fight a duel in Hyde Park where he was shot in his ample belly and lived to quip that he would have died had his opponent, William Adam, not used the Government Issue, gunpowder.

Due to countless cartoons of Fox by James Gilray and others, Fox was among the most recognisable figures of the Regency period. Prints of Gilray's cartoons hang in The Fox dining rooms with the kind permission of The National Gallery.

Being a member of the Prince of Wales' set; he never endeared himself to the establishment of George 3rd. Neither did his intellectual support for revolutionary causes in France and America nor his progressive views on civil liberties and slave emancipation.

When gambling debts looked set to bankrupt him, fellow MPs had a whip-round that cleared the debt and provided Fox with an income. It was at that time in the 1780s that Fox came to live in the area with his mistress and former courtesan, Elizabeth Armistead, on nearby St. Anne's Hill. With the help of his neighbour and friend, Sir Joseph Mawbey, at Botley Park, Fox took to country living which began to restore his body and spirit.

He recalled to public life all too quickly in 1801 and he died an untimely and lamented death in 1806. Fox was buried among the great and good at Westminster Abbey, statues of him can be found in Bloomsbury Square and the House of Commons.

Sir Joseph did not long out-live Fox and the estate broke up upon his death in 1817. His daughter and son-in-law, John Ivatt-Briscoe, bought the area now known as Fox's Hill and France Farm; this founded the estate that we know today. A successful lawyer and local MP, John Ivatt-Brisoce, commissioned the fashionable architect, Basevi, cousin to Disraeli, to build the current Manor House in which you see today. Basevi's work included Ely Cathedral in Cambridge, where came to his untimely death inspecting the bell tower. A prodigy of the great classicist, Sir John Soane, Basevi designed the Manor to reflect the spirit of the new Victorian age in its restrained charm and elegance.

As an MP, Ivatt-Brisoce was concerned with local issues; helping to found the Chertsey Agricultural Association. Their annual ploughing match is held to this day. His only national initiative was to campaign for the outlaw of the treadmill as a form of punishment (visitors to our HealthSpa gym will sympathise).

In the 1870s, the estate was passed to a distant relative of Ivatt-Briscoe, General Hutton. A veteran of the Zulu and Boer wars, Hutton was well regarded for his active role in parish life. We recently met two sisters who remember playing at Foxhills after the Great War. Apparently, Hutton felt responsible for the families of the men who fell under his command and invited them to play in the grounds during their holidays. With our adventure playground and great family facilities in The Pavilion, the family atmosphere and emphasis lives on.

After serving as a convalescent home for wounded officers during the Great War, the estate was sold to the Borthwicks, a successful merchant family in the 1920s. They ran the estate and farm in the manner unchanged since Ivatt-Briscoe and people still remember working at the 'Big House'. The complement of staff totalled around 15. They included a second chauffeur, Trevor Francis and third housemaid, Evelyn. Fraternisation was not encouraged and when their relationship was discovered, she was forced to leave. They subsequently married in 1940 and celebrated their 50th anniversary here, in the Manor.

During the Second War, the family energetically turned the farm, now the Bernard Hunt golf course, over to the 'Dig for Victory' campaign. By the 1960s a gradual decline had set in which resulted in the estate being sold to Aer Lingus and turned into a golf club in 1975. This apparently random investment followed the first energy crisis in 1973, when the Irish flag carrier decided to diversify. So, a site near Heathrow was chosen and Foxhills as a golf club was born.

Ian Hayton acquired the club in 1983 having run clubs and recently sold Pennyhill Park Hotel in nearby Bagshot. Under his stewardship, Foxhills has flourished, from just 30 staff to more than 300 today and an Olympic array of facilities offering members more than 200 activities a week.

The club's influence reaches beyond its 400 acres into the community. It has the oldest golf scholarship programme, the Foxhills Foundation, which can name Tour professionals and a Ryder Cup stars amongst its many graduates. The club supports charity events each year and, during the second Covid lockdown in 2020, members raised £28,000 for local foodbanks in time for Christmas. Through the Foxhills Community Camps dozens of the most deserving local children enjoy a month of free camps including hearty meals and transport.

Now a luxury family-friendly club & resort with two championship golf courses, one nine-hole par-three course, 66 bedrooms, 11 tennis courts, five swimming pools, HealthSpa, gym, four fitness studios and conference facilities, the club has continued to develop and grow under the leadership of Ian and his son Marc, who took over as managing director in 2010.

The club also now has three fabulous restaurants including The Fox dining rooms which has an AA Rosette. We think that, given his love for food, wine and socialising, Charles James Fox would feel very much at home.