

Out·On·The·Course

John Campbell meets the man in charge of 36 holes of prime golfing territory at The Berkshire.

THE Berkshire Golf Club at Ascot is one of those natural heathland courses in an attractive silvan setting. Two 18-hole courses—the Blue and Red—have a rich variety of excellent golf holes to test the skill and ability of all kinds of player. The club has all the character of the acid heathland—resilient, springy turf, an abundance of heather and majestic tree-lined fairways that contribute an essential element of strategy and add to the aesthetic appeal of the golfing scene.

The upkeep of the two courses is in the capable hands of Bob Moreton, 40, an intelligent and genial family man who moved to the club nearly three years ago with his wife Valerie, daughter Rosalind, 19, and son Adrian, 16. "I came into greenkeeping by accident. My family were in golf, but I was more interested in farming," Bob said. "At 21, between jobs, I was asked to help my father who is a professional golfer. I was then a low-handicap player and enjoyed working on the course.

"Eventually, I was faced with the decision to become a professional golfer or take up greenkeeping as a career. I chose the latter. I don't play quite so much golf nowadays. My hobbies are music, male voice choir singing and, more particularly, my job."

Bob Moreton began greenkeeping at Flempton Golf Club—a nine-hole course in East Anglia on sandy soil. After seven years there, he took up his first job as a head greenkeeper at Bishops Stortford Golf Club. From there, he went to Ashburnham, a



Bob Moreton

championship links in South Wales. He was persuaded to return to Bishops Stortford and stayed for seven years, after which he went to Patshull Park, a new complex that went bankrupt. He worked with the receiver for over two years before finally moving to The Berkshire.

"After caring for an 18-hole course, I was not quite sure how I would handle 36 holes, but I soon got into my stride and enthusiasm for the job has enabled me to cope.

"There are nine men on the staff—a full-time mechanic Vic King, who has proved to be worth his weight in gold. My assistant, John Haines, was promoted from the ranks and the

other seven are all experienced journeymen greenkeepers. I take special interest in the training of younger staff members and consider it important to tell them what is being done and why.

"I often wish that youngsters coming into greenkeeping would ask more questions, rather than just being content to pick up the rudiments of the trade by seeing it being done. If they were more inquisitive, they would learn more quickly. If they aspire to the top of their profession, they must take the initiative by studying everything about the scientific aspects of turf culture and golf-course management.

"They should try to obtain books on the subject, read articles by experts and make a conscientious effort to absorb all they can. You won't learn everything from books, but they are a good basis from which to build up a deep fund of technical knowledge.

"Like most golf courses nowadays, our main problem is dealing with compaction due to the heavy volume of play. At the moment, about 80 per cent of the work is concentrated on aeration—hollow-tining, slitting, spiking and spooning, all of which plays a vital part in our regime. It's well proven that regular aeration is an important and essential phase of good turf management.

"We are often plagued by cold, dry spring weather in this part of the country, which seems to retard early growth on heathland courses and it is not always easy to present the best



The 16th hole on the Red Course.



Hollow-tine cores on the putting green are swept up.



Irrigation pipes 'in-store' on the practice ground.

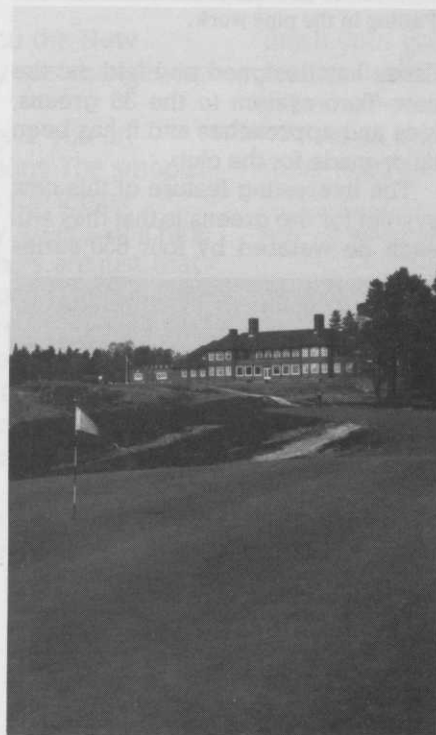
playing conditions early in the season. Our spring treatment programme on the greens included hollow-tining followed by a top-dressing mixture of two parts sand, one part peat, one part soil and Alginure mixed together. I am not a great believer in pure sand dressings, but they are sometimes useful in the autumn to maintain dry putting surfaces through the winter.

"The best advice I would give in dealing with the upkeep of any golf course is not to rush things along. Try to get the work done in a steady and methodical fashion. Don't attempt too much by speeding around with tractors all the time—use a little old-fashioned commonsense. It's better to do a good job on two greens than perform a mediocre task on 12. Stand back occasionally and take stock of progress—speed is essential to get the work done nowadays and yet it is often the biggest enemy.

"We are all inclined sometimes to try and get certain jobs done even when the weather is unsuitable, rather than wait a day for better results."

In discussing stimpeters and fast greens, Bob added: "Using a stimpeter is not very important and I don't think it means very much to the average club member, who merely wants to putt on a green with reasonable pace. They don't want them lightning fast. If your maintenance programme is geared towards firm greens, you will eventually attain the right speed. I would hate to shave the surface and make them too fast just to satisfy the whims of some crank.

"However, in professional golf you have to cater for a different type of player, who likes to putt on a slick, fast surface, so the preparation would be a little bit different. At The Berkshire, we try to satisfy all kinds of golfer and



The Berkshire Golf Club.

I don't think it would be appreciated if we slavishly dedicated our methods to producing exceptionally fast greens. Nobody likes to take three or four putts at every hole.

"I am fortunate to have a good committee and the secretary Mr P. Clark has helped me enormously since I came here. The club has invested over £60,000 in machinery and a lot of money has also been spent on materials within the last three years. The committee has given me full support in all that I have done, although we have not yet reaped the full benefit of our investment.

"To carry out any programme of course improvements, you have to discuss all aspects of the work with club officials to gain their approval and convince them of the necessity for any changes. I always make a point of meeting the secretary every day to discuss any problems, the work programme and generally keep him up to date on all that is happening on the course, so he is able to keep the membership informed.

"We have recently installed one of the latest and most sophisticated irrigation systems with individual head control," Bob said. "Having an automatic watering system is a good thing in itself. It allows you to carry out an extensive programme of verticutting, top-dressing and fertilising, whether it is sulphate of ammonia, sulphate of iron or whatever you use.

"But having single head control is far superior, for it gives me greater control over the amount of water I place on each part of every green. One of the things I am looking forward to is being able to judge which particular section of the putting surface wants that little bit of extra water—slopes and undulations will have to be taken into account.

Continued overleaf...



Greenkeeping staff have a spacious machinery and equipment shed.

Out·On·The·Course Continued...

"It's going to take a little time to sort everything out and, obviously, it will be important to rely on our local knowledge of all the prevailing conditions to determine a satisfactory programme for each individual green. Single head control will help eliminate the deluge effect of four sprinklers coming on together. With each pop-up set on its own timed schedule, there will be greater efficiency, less chance of flooding and better water absorption.

"On heathland, the grasses come under a little more stress from drying winds and, while there may be moisture in the soil, the surface tends to dry out. We can alleviate this by light syringing with the irrigation system to relieve the surface tension."

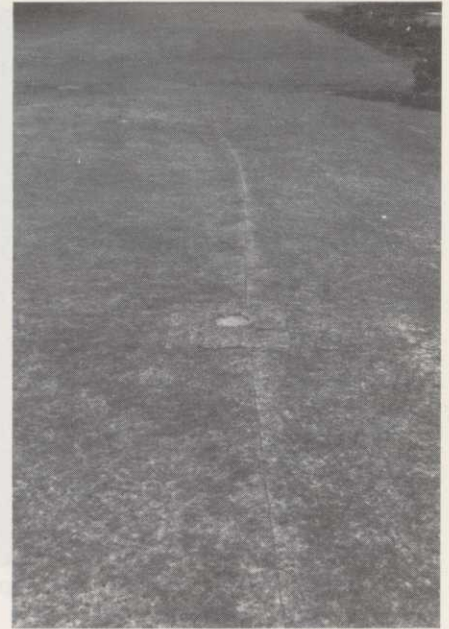
Installation work on the irrigation scheme commenced at the beginning of the year and it is now in operation. Golf Landscapes of Brentwood in



Pulling in the pipe work.

Essex has designed and laid out the new Toro system to the 36 greens, tees and approaches and it has been tailor-made for the club.

The interesting feature of this new system for the greens is that they will each be watered by four 650 series



A very neat job...

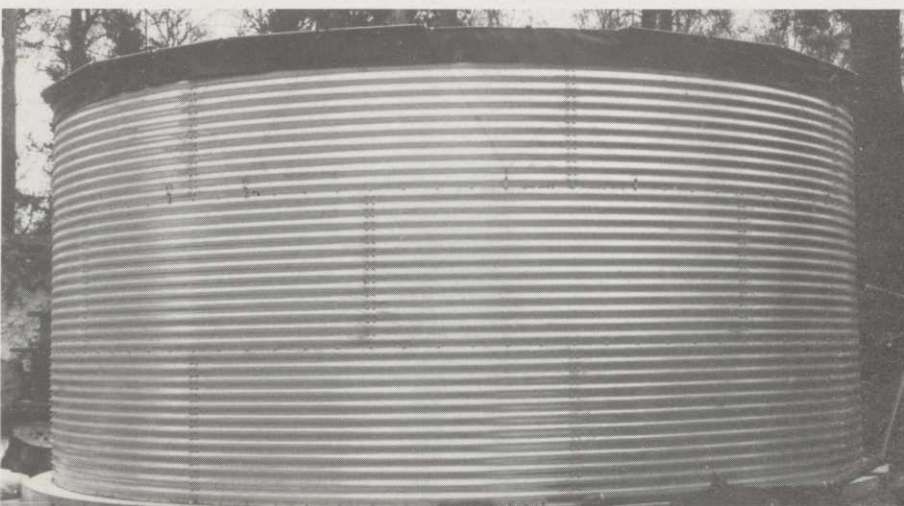
pop-up sprinklers by individual control for improved efficiency. In this country, most other systems have been installed on a block design, which activates all the sprinklers on a green simultaneously. This means that the same amount of water is applied to each part of the green.

Watering in this manner is not always desirable since slopes and high spots on the surface may need more water than hollows and areas in constant shade. The single head system gives a greater degree of flexibility to the watering programme and has implicit advantages in turf culture for the course manager.

All the tees and approaches on the two courses will be watered by Toro 650, 640 and Super 600 series sprinklers, with use of full circle, adjustable part circle and two speed heads as particular locations require. Certain fairway areas will be watered with quick coupling hose points and Toro's new Micro 44 travelling sprinkler.



A conference with Golf Landscapes irrigation engineers.



The water storage tank for the new irrigation system holds 45,000 gallons.

Additional Data

A total of 800 stations can be deployed at The Berkshire. These are connected by 15,000m of piping. The controller is an eight zone Toro Aquasonics 800 station sequential electronic and served by a special set of three Grundfos pumps. "This is the first large scale single head control irrigation system, giving flexibility to the management of golf turf, to be installed in the UK. I'm sure it is the first of many," Golf Landscapes director Howard Swan said.