

# Out · On · The · Course

by John Campbell

Derek Green is the links manager at Royal Liverpool GC — known across the world as Hoylake.

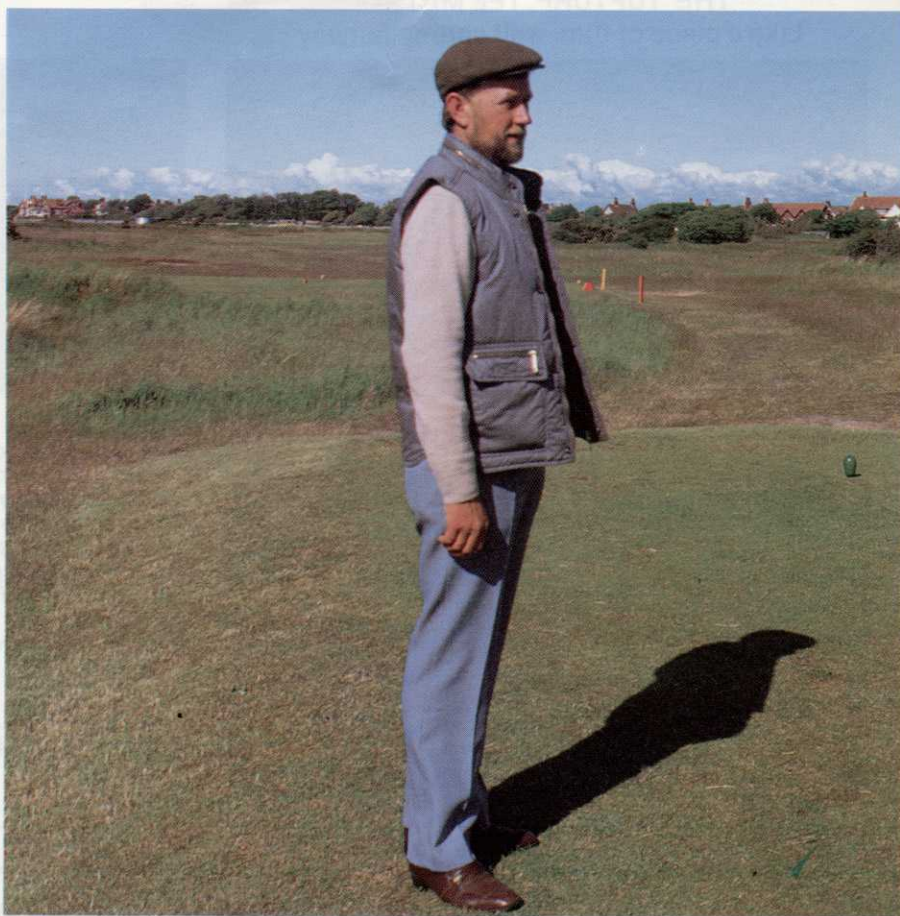
THE links of Royal Liverpool Golf Club, Hoylake is acknowledged to be one of the finest tests of golf in the world. At first sight, this tough, epic course is uninspiring to behold on a large, flat expanse of land. The area of the links is large and there is an air of wide open space. Low, artificial two-foot-high banks called cops are a predominant feature along the edges of fairways.

At the far end of the links, from the 9th tee, you get a magnificent view of the estuary sands and the Welsh coast across the Dee. Along the sea dunes grow myriads of wild briar roses, which give a lovely scented aroma when in flower. They also have a practical golfing function as a hazard and are zealously protected as part of the natural flora of the links.

In the *Badminton Book On Golf* of 1890, Horace Hutchison wrote: 'The links of Hoylake are associated in the mind of every golfer who has played upon them with the most perfect greens in the world. Though in summer of a glassy keenness, they are beautifully true. More long putts are sunk at Hoylake than on any other links.'

My memories of Royal Liverpool go back nearly 40 years to the days when Tom Bridges was head greenkeeper, so I was interested to talk to Derek Green, who has recently taken over the post of course manager at this famous club. Derek, 39, lives with his adaptable and industrious wife Jennifer and six-year-old son in the greenkeeper's cottage. He lists his hobbies as golf and steam engines and he likes to work on a preserved railway at Welshpool.

"I was born at Shirley outside Birmingham and, after leaving school, I did a five-year apprenticeship with the Birmingham parks department at their horticultural centre Kingsley Park, where I specialised in turf culture for the last three years," Derek said. "At the end of my training, I



Derek Green.

passed the Institute of Groundsmanship first-class examination. I was attracted to golf-course management, for I considered it a much bigger challenge than sportsground upkeep. I was also interested in the flora that abounds on the much greater areas of golf courses.

"My initial job was as first assistant at one of the Birmingham municipal courses. Then, at the age of 21, I moved to Gay Hill Golf Club on the outskirts of the city as head greenkeeper. From there, I moved to Woburn, where I remained for ten years.

"Woburn was an incredible challenge at that point in my career. I went there in 1975 as head greenkeeper to take charge of the new 18-hole course, which was almost completed. In 1978, I was given the job, with a staff of four, to build the Duchess Course. We started in May and completed most of the construction work the day before Christmas, having sowed out the first nine holes. They were open-

ed for play the following year. Then we reconstructed nine greens on the Dukes Course, built the putting green and landscaped the clubhouse surrounds, laid out 38 acres of car parking space and the nine-acre practice ground.

"It has always been my ambition to take charge of a links course, so when the vacancy arose at Royal Liverpool I thought the time was right to apply for the job. At the interview, I was most impressed by the enthusiasm and commitment of club officials. I was eventually offered the job and here I am!"

When I asked Derek if he was overawed by the history and tradition of his famous club, he said: "I don't think that anyone could fail to be inspired by the atmosphere, the clubhouse and setting of the links out on the end of the Wirral peninsula. I think the course is crying out to be restored to its former glory and prestige among the great championship links. I am keen to bring



back the fescues and bents by gearing our management programme to encourage the return of these linksland grasses.

"Although annual meadow grass is a problem, my main concern at the moment is getting rid of areas on the fairways that have a high percentage of ryegrass and it will mean completely returning these particular places. We don't have a proper turf nursery at the moment - last year, parts of the practice ground were lifted for turf repair jobs. The intention this year is to establish a large tract of spare ground between the 3rd and 14th fairways as a turf nursery, a large part of which will have turf of a lesser quality for bunker revetting and general repairs and we will also have a 1,000sq yds of fine quality turf for greens.

"One of my main priorities in the forthcoming months is to get more topdressing on to all the important areas, such as greens, tees and approaches, to build up good surface levels and make the turf firm and resilient to cope with all the wear and tear. So, for the rest of the year, that will be my main objective. We are going to reshape a lot of the fairways and semi-rough to add to the strategy of play and make the course layout more attractive.

"We also have to tackle the worm population in many areas, for their activities are changing the character of the links turf and this is a factor contributing to the amount of weed control that has to be done."

I asked Derek if he looked forward to having big tournaments at



Hoylake town in the distance dominates this view of the 11th green.

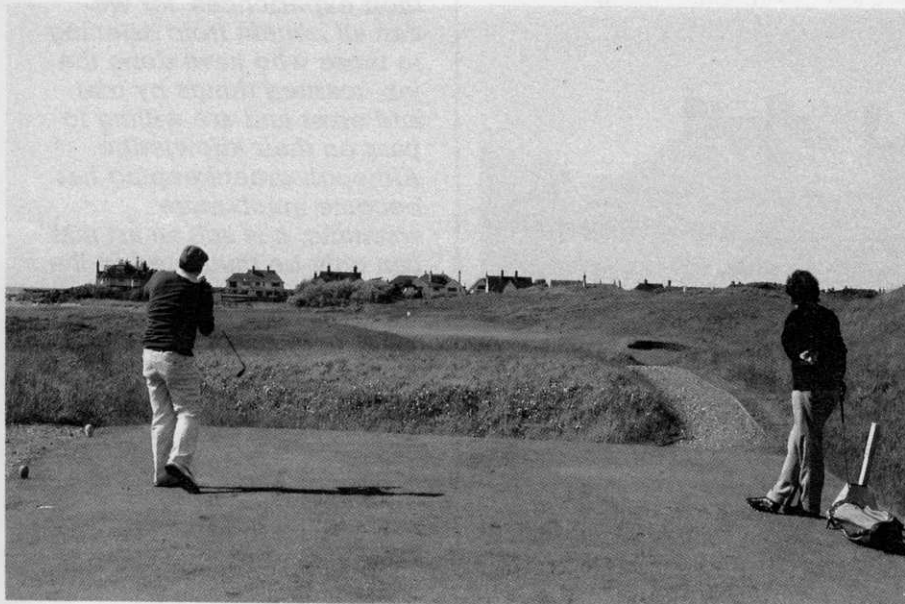
Hoylake. "I would love to see a major PGA European Tour event or the Amateur Championship here. A major event would be good for the club and the greenkeeping staff. This famous links has a great reputation and we must strive to maintain it constantly in first-class condition to please the members and attract the interest and attention of championship and tournament officials.

"Although we have automatic irrigation laid on to fairways, greens and tees, I intend to use it only when absolutely necessary, the objective being to keep the minimum moisture levels that will promote and encourage the natural characteristics and vigour

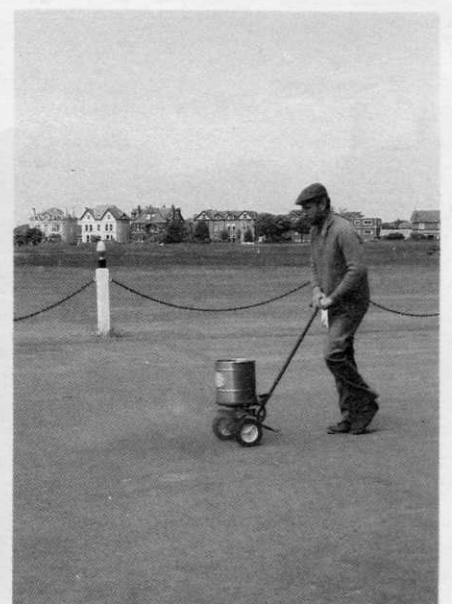
of seaside turf. In addition to this, we will concentrate on frequent topdressing and aeration to produce a resilient playing surface."

In discussing the pros and cons of pedestrian mowers versus triplex mowers for cutting greens, Derek said: "I don't think there is any difference at all in the quality of cut. However, the aesthetic appearance of the greens cut with single unit machines seems to give a greater visual impact. At Hoylake, we probably do 80 per cent of our greens mowing with pedestrian mowers and resort to triplex mowers when staff are needed to get on with other work priorities. For example, if we are topdress-

*Continued overleaf...*



On the tee at the short 11th.



Fertiliser is applied...

## Hoylake – Continued...

ing and want the greens cut first, we then use the triplex machines to free the maximum number of staff to concentrate on the top-dressing programme."

I asked Derek what encouragement he would give to a young man coming into the profession. "I think it is important he works with an experienced greenkeeper, who will take the time to explain and teach him properly. If he feels that this part of his training is being neglected, he should be prepared to move to another club. The main hope for the future is that EIGGA will come up with a proper greenkeeping educational course within the next few years, so that young men can get a really good training in theory and practice.

"I would exhort all young men to use their initiative more and not to sit down and wait for someone to do it for them. When I started in greenkeeping, we attended evening classes and spent a lot of our own time looking at other courses and comparing notes. Some young men today don't want to go anywhere unless they are getting all their expenses paid and, quite often, they are not prepared to make any effort of their own volition to advance in their job.

"I really think a good



Hoylake boasts a first-class, modern compost shed.

greenkeepers' association can do much for its membership. For many years, I was a member of the IOG and secretary of the local branch in Birmingham. I joined EIGGA when it was first formed and I've now moved to an area that has a strong group. I know they are moving in the right direction and hope they will establish a good educational scheme for the younger generation's benefit."

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### Looking In The Mirror

*We asked Derek Green for his views on Greenkeeper, how the magazine can be improved and the type of features he would like to see in it.*

*"I enjoy reading*

*Greenkeeper very much – it's a good publication. I would like to see a machinery section with all the simple engineering jobs, etc, covered. Fifty per cent of our time is often spent keeping equipment in good working order.*

*So, articles by a competent engineer should be featured – someone who could explain with the aid of photos and illustrations how to carry out everyday maintenance tasks.*

*"I would also like to see more articles on the general upkeep of golf courses and the problems that arise and how they can be tackled. Let us have more practical experts (such as greenkeepers) writing about their experiences, for we can all benefit from listening to those who have done the job, learned things by trial and error and are willing to pass on their knowledge. Although greenkeeping has become much more scientific, it is still an art that can only be cultivated in the hard school of experience."*

*I'm sure there is a name to be made by someone willing to put pen to paper. All working greenkeepers are hard-pressed, but this magazine welcomes contributions from any of them and is willing to provide practical advice. Ed.*



The 5th at Hoylake.