

Taking the course to water

Herefordshire club splashes out £30,000

to defy the laws of nature



F. Bradley (hon sec), L. Griffiths (pro and course supervisor), R. Fox (captain), V. Galliers (chairman of greens) and G. Long (treasurer) at the opening ceremony. (Photo: courtesy of the *Hereford Times*.)

A DAY at Kington Golf Club is always one to remember. For the many visitors to the highest 18-hole course in England and Wales, there are spectacular views across seven counties.

But Kington golf is a serious business and Open champion Sandy Lyle was not to be distracted by panoramas stretching from the Welsh Black Mountains and Brecon Beacons to the Malvern Hills and the Shropshire Wrekin when he visited this Herefordshire borderland club and set the course record of 68 just before turning professional.

Even so, members recently had occasion to celebrate not with champagne, but thousands of gallons of water when the president of the Shropshire and Hereford Golf Union Doug Humphries turned the taps on Kington's new £30,000 watering system. This was the price that had to be paid for the course's superb situation - at its highest point, 1,300 feet up Bradnor Hill.

Quality golf has been the name of the game at Kington

since Cecil Hutchison was invited to lay out the course in 1924. But, for 60 years, the greens were dependent entirely upon rainwater.

According to 1985 club captain Tony Wright, after the severe droughts of 1983-4, it was generally felt that the perennially parched summer grass "mitigated against the future of the club" and drastic measures were called for.

But, at that height, short of moving mountains, where was the water to come from?

Water-diviners were called in and various schemes found to be impractical before Vic Galliers, determined chairman of the greens committee, persuaded the Welsh Water Board to sell the club a spring and redundant pumping station at the foot of Bradnor Hill. All that remained was finding a way to make the water flow 600 feet uphill!

The engineering contract was put out to tender and the North Staffordshire Irrigation Company began work on the project in

October. A massive amount of piping with electric wiring was laid to pump the water up to a vast 8,000 gallon holding tank half way up the course. It is then sent round two separate circuits of sprinklers.

Such a system required an equally ingenious plan to finance it. Some £20,000 was raised in interest-free loans from individuals among Kington's 400 members. The money came in £100 units, which will be repaid over the next ten years to the lenders whose names are pulled out of a hat each year. The final £10,000 was lent by the Sports Council.

The sprinklers will operate from May to September every year, dispensing an estimated 18,000 gallons of water a week in very dry conditions. "We're expecting to attract more visiting parties and casual visitors, as well as increased applications for membership.

"We would also like to see the course become a permanent fixture for county matches," Tony Wright added.