

Out on the course



John Philp.

John Philp, links superintendent at Carnoustie, recently met *Greenkeeper's* regular correspondent John Campbell.

THE town of Carnoustie is a small unpretentious resort on the Angus coast – a popular spot for family holidays. Its main claim to fame is a championship golf course, well-known all over the world. Carnoustie has carried the game to most corners of the golfing world and, since the early days, has produced many teaching professionals.

To Americans, Carnoustie is holy, for it was in copying the swing of Stewart Maiden that Bobby Jones learned to play. The famous links has been the scene of many epic events including the Open Championship, which was last played there in 1975 when Tom Watson triumphed. The quality of the test of golf is reflected in the names of other Open winners there – Player, Cotton, Armour and Ben Hogan.

The man recently appointed to manage the links is John Philp, formerly assistant links supervisor at St Andrews. John is an energetic and enthusiastic student of golf-course upkeep with a knowledgeable viewpoint on many aspects of his chosen profession.

"I was attracted to greenkeeping when I used to play a lot of golf at Pitreavie Golf Club in Dunfermline, my home town," he

said. "During school holidays, I worked on the course and found the style of life and involvement in the game appealed. On leaving school, I was offered a job with the club as apprentice greenkeeper and my career has gradually blossomed from there.

"I was a fairly good player and toyed with the prospect of taking up professional golf and, in fact, I was appointed head greenkeeper/professional at Pitreavie in 1970. After marrying in 1971, the following two or three years were very hectic with my dual role at the club and it became apparent that a choice had to be made.

"The golf professional position was a 'sideline' really and my heart was in course maintenance, so I opted for greenkeeping and have no regrets. It is a way of life I enjoy and you generally find that the vast majority of good greenkeepers or superintendents are dedicated to their vocation.

"In 1974, I moved to Newmarket Golf Club on the Suffolk-Cambridgeshire border, where I had my first experience of triplex greens mowers and automatic irrigation systems. I enjoyed five years in the employ of a friendly and generous club, looking after an attractive heathland/parkland

course. From there, I was fortunate enough to be appointed to the new position of assistant links supervisor at St Andrews in 1979.

"Going to St Andrews was a big step up. To be involved with the home of golf and the famous links was getting close to the peak of my ambition. I was tackling a much bigger challenge where there are four and a half golf courses to look after – all public links – which also meant broadening the scope of my experience and getting used to dealing with a much bigger staff.

"I enjoyed working with Walter Woods at St Andrews and learned a great deal from him, as well as from the links engineer George McLaren, for which I am deeply indebted. Now I have the responsibility of managing the Carnoustie links, my ambition has been realised."

John and Helen Philp have three children – two boys and a girl. "At the moment, I am commuting daily to Carnoustie until I sell my house in St Andrews – it's about 40 minutes by road, not always convenient with regular early starts and late finishes."

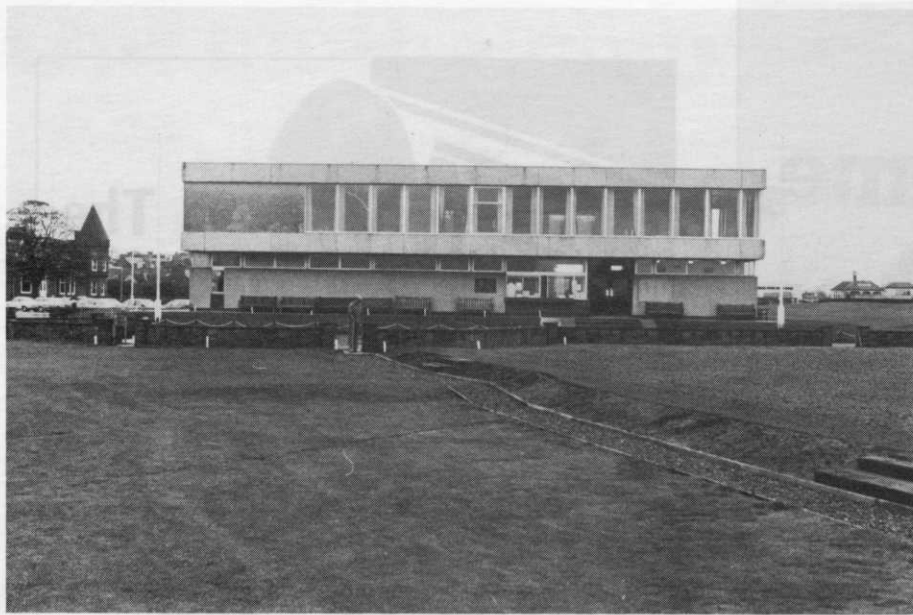
Open venue

"It is my goal and the wish of the links management to stage the Open Championship again at Carnoustie, but we have to convince the powers that be of our suitability. Of course, there are several aspects to be considered by the R & A, apart from the course itself. However, we feel these can be accommodated and the aim is to get the course into a condition that merits their unequivocal support.

"My brief is to raise the standards by improving the efficiency and quality of the maintenance programme, encouraging the return of true links conditions. We are working in close collaboration with Jim Arthur and the intention is that everything possible be done to achieve our objective.

"We have a big job ahead of us and there is a great deal of work to be done. Bad flooding last autumn from the Barry Burn overflow set progress back and is something that will have to be dealt with in the long term. Although our priority is getting the championship course into first-class condition, we cannot af-

Continued on page 20...



A modern clubhouse overlooks the 1st tee on Carnoustie's championship course.

ford to neglect our other two 18-hole courses, which are an important part of the operation.

"To maintain the three courses, we have 11 on the greens staff and a full-time maintenance engineer, supplemented by one or two seasonal employees and young lads on the government YTS programme.

"We really have to persevere with our system, similar to that at St Andrews, where young men with the right potential, are employed, fully trained through college courses and built up through on-the-job training. We have three young apprentices who recently completed educational courses at the Kingsway Technical College in Dundee and one in training at present.

"We have two major events here this year, the British Youths' and the Scottish Amateur Stroke-play Championships, in addition to a whole host of foreign visitors and golf society bookings, not forgetting local clubs' calendars. About 40 per cent of our income comes from visiting golfers, of which a high percentage are American - they boost the revenue and allow us to invest more money on the upkeep of the courses.

"Our maintenance programme is along the lines of proven green-keeping practices. The high volume of play creates major compaction problems and much wear and tear, so regular aeration is an important part of the regime, particularly during autumn and winter. We don't have an extensive automatic irrigation system,

but we have embarked on a scheme to provide automatic irrigation on the championship course for greens, tees and approaches. Eventually, we plan to extend this to the fairways and, in phased stages, to the other courses.

"A present priority is improving the drainage on the championship course. We have about five or six fairways where work is needed to get rid of casual water in low 'lying' areas more rapidly. We have done a considerable amount of this work on the 6th, 17th and 18th fairways, where some sunken spot levels have been raised and pipework installed with boxes and drain covers to ensure quick dispersal of surface water into the Barry Burn or open drainage ditches.

"The fairways are dominated by poa annua, which aggravated the surface water problem last year. We intend to reduce this infestation by appropriate management encouraging the indigenous bents and fescues to gradually re-populate the sward. We will be looking closely at reducing seed-head production and will be over-seeding as and when the situation dictates. Routing fairway aeration is accomplished with two SISIS D.P.48s, varying the knife depth. All fairways have been hollow-tined with a fine turf aerator.

"The links management has recently purchased SISIS Triple Veemo units and a Litamisa Sweeper, as well as an Atkinson spreader.

"Approaches to the greens in

certain places are dominated by ryegrass, which was probably introduced many years ago by seed or the use of poor-quality turf for repairs. It creates an unsightly appearance, with dense colonies of rye standing proud of the surrounding areas of finer grasses. It is particularly noticeable in the winter and has no place on any links.

"Obviously, the quickest way to deal with this problem is by reurfing, but this would require several acres of good nursery turf and we don't have a sufficient supply. Most of our nursery area has been reseeded recently, leaving about an acre of usable material. The new sward is not established well enough for our purposes yet - it generally takes about four or five years for nursery turf to be mature enough for use on the links, so a good proportion of our turf requirement is cut from outlying areas on the Buddon course.

"The unused nursery area is dominated, to some extent, by finer grasses, but it has a fair amount of *Nardus Stricta*, or mat grass, which does not form a good dense sward at low heights of cut. I am reluctant to use it, for it does not blend well due to its habit of growth - it has been used on several tee extensions in the past, but not very successfully.

"Teeing-ground, especially on the championship course, is generous with many holes having well over 1,000sq yds in total. Tee maintenance will be similar to greens, although not so intensive.

"The greens, like the other main playing surfaces, contain a fairly high percentage of annual meadow grass, concentrated mainly in the centres creating a marked contrast with the better quality grasses dominating perimeters and higher spots on most greens. The correct firmness and turf resiliency, critical playing qualities, are almost impossible to achieve while poa annua dominates the sward. This, of course, is not an uncommon situation and the promotion of desirable bent species, which constitute about 20 per cent along with the poa annua on many green centres, will be the initial objective as the small percentage of fine fescues is unable to compete effectively at present in these heavily compacted areas.

"I am not convinced that over-seeding in this situation is the

answer and it is a costly exercise that often produces minimal long-term improvements in sward quality. Intensive and timely aeration at suitable depths with appropriate tines, regular verticutting and the use of wetting agents and processed seaweed products will figure prominently in the greens maintenance programme, as will frequent light applications of sandy top-dressings.

"Greens on the championship and Burnside courses were verti-drained for the first time last autumn and the soil ameliorant Terra-Green brushed into the holes in local wet areas. Subsequent hollow-tining in these areas was followed by further treatment with Terra-Green. With regard to the vastly improved drainage of surface water, the combined results of this work have been excellent. This type of maintenance will be repeated as the occasion arises.

"We use Ransomes triplex mowers for greens mowing in conjunction with the Auto-Certes and have recently purchased a new Toro Greensmaster 3 with verti-cutting reels to assist in thatch control. We have six Ransomes Auto-Certes, which are used whenever possible, particularly for major events and other periods when soft surface conditions preclude the use of triplex mowers."

Maximum support

How, I wondered, does John view the future of greenkeeping associations? "It is essential that we have strong national associations with maximum support from greenkeepers employed in the trade. I would like to see a situation similar to that in Sweden where membership of the national association is obligatory for all greenkeeping employees. This type of commitment can only improve the greenkeeper's employment situation and general well-being.

"At the moment, there seems to be dissension in the ranks of greenkeepers, but I am convinced that it is only a matter of time before we get together with a united national body. We can still have separate identities, but it is important that we should all get under one UK banner to gain both credibility in the eyes of the golfing world and the recognition we deserve. Only in this way, can



A heavy-duty spiker with 9in tines works the fairways.

uniformity in greenkeeping training, for instance, come about.

"There was some talk about a possible merger, if that's the correct word, with the PGA, but I don't agree with that at all. I think we should be seen to be able to stand as a united and independent group."

John closed by discussing the advancement of greenkeeping methods and equipment. "All turf managers are interested in any machinery developments. Much has been done in the field of aeration to relieve compaction at lower levels and to break through any existing pan immediately below shallower (3in to 6in) spik-

ing depths. Greens are mowed much more frequently than in the past and the compaction from trafficking is vastly increased, so effective aeration is the priority on modern golf courses to afford the opportunity for healthy plant development."

John would be the first to admit that he has a major task ahead of him to restore true links conditions to Carnoustie. His associates know that he is the right type, with the experience, grit and determination, to accomplish the job.

I predict the Open Championship will return to this famous links in the not-too-distant future.



Expansive equipment sheds.