

Out On The Course



LETHAM GRANGE

Jim Grainger, course manager at Letham Grange, talks to *Greenkeeper* correspondent John Campbell.

THE opening of a new golf course is always a cause for jubilation among golfers in any part of the country, but it is even more important to the greenkeeping profession. Scotland has always had more than its share of good courses and now another has been added to the list in the shape of the Letham Grange Golf and Country Club, near Arbroath.

The inauguration ceremony was performed adroitly by the old master, Henry Cotton, whose golfing skill in an earlier age is still remembered on the famous Carnoustie links nearby.

Tribute was paid by members and guests to the way the course is being groomed and gradually brought to maturity by course manager Jim Grainger and his staff.

There can't be many greenkeepers with a greater wealth of golf course construction experience than Jim has under his belt at such an early stage. Jim, 37, is essentially an outdoor man, a great lover of country pursuits such as fishing and shooting. With his tall, muscular frame he is a natural athlete and was a useful boxer.

Idyllic

Jim and Jean Grainger live with their two children in idyllic surroundings. "I longed to have my own house with a little piece of land. I have been able to buy this right on the edge of the Letham Grange course and I am monarch of all I survey," Jim said.

"After leaving school and trying one or two jobs, I went to

work with Jack McMillan at Cardross Golf Club in the west of Scotland. I got a first-class training in all aspects of course management and upkeep and I was also involved with the building and construction of three new holes there.

"Afterwards, I moved to Durham City GC where I helped to build a completely new course. Then at Middlesbrough I brought on another new course until it was opened for play. Later, I went to Largs in Ayrshire where we did a lot of alterations to greens and tees.

"I came to Letham Grange because it was a challenge and it looked a new and exciting project in over 300 acres of beautiful country. It seemed to be an ideal piece of land for such a develop-



The 3rd green with some impressive housing in the background.

ment with a very promising future and I was keen to be part of it."

What did he think the main problems were on new courses? "Very often it's drainage - drainage should be done properly before construction work is started," Jim said. "Compaction is also another problem common to new courses - very often it occurs around greens. Experience has taught me to try and keep the movement of soil, materials and heavy machinery well away from playing areas to eliminate the danger of compaction in the early construction stages.

"If it has not been possible to use stone separating machinery in the construction work, due to weather and other factors, stones coming to the surface may cause a few headaches for the first 18



Scottish pro Harry Bannerman with Jim Grainger.

months after the course is opened. Golfers are annoyed when they damage an expensive club on a partially concealed stone near the surface.

"I found a good way to tackle the problem was to enlist a squad of enthusiastic ladies to systematically deal with the worst spots on fairways by prising out surface stones with a screwdriver. This was highly successful, but time consuming.

"We have a situation here where private houses are being built around the perimeter of the course as part of the development and it may necessitate access for mains services, such as water and electricity, over parts of the course. Naturally, we are expected to reinstate the ground after the work has been done, but these are minor matters we take in our stride."

What advice did he have for greenkeepers working on new courses? "Try to be patient and remember it takes time and a lot of hard work to bring a course to maturity. Mowing height is very important and don't cut too close for the first couple of seasons until there is a good amount of fibre in the turf to act as a cushion.

"I would also recommend starting off with old machinery for the first season until the course has settled down, after which it is generally possible to use new equipment without fear of damaging blades on stones or other debris.

"As for running the course, I

deal with Ken Smith, the developer, on a weekly basis and this is a good arrangement. We have a golf club committee representing the membership and I occasionally attend their meetings as an advisor. I think it is important to keep in touch with the golfers to let them know what's happening on the course - it also gives them the opportunity to air their views.

"When I came to the club the only equipment was a set of Ransomes Magna gangmowers, which did all the initial mowing while the course was in a semi-rough state. We used a couple of old pedestrian motor mowers for the greens until we were satisfied that new machines would bring

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Letham Grange developer Ken Smith.

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Jim points to the house he built for himself beside the golf course.



12th green looking back to the tee.

**LETHAM GRANGE –
CONTINUED...**

them up to the required standard for the opening date.

"We have purchased five Lloyds Paladin mowers – two will be used on the tees and the other three on the greens. A set of Green's five hydraulic mounted gangs is used on the fairways and we have various leaf-sweepers and a Twose sub-air for aeration. A Kubota mini-tractor is on order and we intend to base a range of suitable attachments round the mini-tractor for greens work, etc.

"I have a first assistant and three permanent staff working on the course. In addition, I have also had YTS boys helping out. Ken Smith has farms in the district and we can call upon those workers when we are busy on major projects and, from what I have seen, they do a very good job with their big John Deere tractors. They also have other heavy machinery, such as JCBs and a Hymac, which are extremely useful for certain kinds of con-

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struction work.

"With regard to irrigation, we have not installed any permanent system yet. Last summer, the greens stood up fairly well to a five-week dry period; it is our intention not to use a lot of water to encourage the fine grasses, such as bents and fescues, predominant in the greens. If it is necessary to irrigate, as a last resort we have agricultural watering equipment with powerful pumps that will allow us to make use of the many streams and ponds scattered over the course."

Jim Grainger has a deep interest in greenkeeping association affairs. "I was involved in the administration of SIGGA's Ayrshire section for several years while I was at Largs. Since moving here, I have lost touch with things but I intend to resume my support as soon as possible. We all welcome the setting up of BIGGA and the training and education programmes that will do much to raise the status of our profession.

"We have much to look forward to in the future."



Brian Pierson whose company provided course construction management, on the 17th tee.

NG RANGE.

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