

The magnificent view from the Willingdon clubhouse.

## OUT ON THE COURSE

**PETER NEGUS, 36, head greenkeeper at Willingdon Golf Club, Eastbourne on the East Sussex coast, is a likeable, modest man with intense enthusiasm for his job.**

*John Campbell reports.*

"I was educated at boarding school near Reigate in Surrey," Peter said. "On leaving school, I spent two years as an apprentice welder, during which time I took holiday work at Burnham Beeches, a parkland course in Buckinghamshire. The job appealed to me so much that I joined the staff and spent nine happy years working under a very good head greenkeeper, Brian Payne.

"In 1977, I was appointed head greenkeeper at Willingdon and now live within easy reach of the club." He has been married to Barbara 14 years and the couple have two boys, Daniel, 11, and Stephen, 7, "one of whom I hope will follow in father's footsteps!

"My hobbies are golf, snooker and photography. I think golf is essential for every greenkeeper. It allows him to understand the game and appreciate golfers' needs. Photography plays an important part in my record-keeping, as construction, etc, is better recorded visually. As for snooker, well, if you can't putt, you can always use a cue!

"My other main interest is computers, which I find a great asset

in the job. Comparing work programmes from year to year in graphical, as well as written, form and then cross-referencing them can be very enlightening. Time spent programming is well-rewarded and facts obtained from data can be endless."

Willingdon is an attractive downland course on the town's outskirts. Formed with nine holes in 1898, it was redesigned first under the direction of J.H. Taylor

in 1904 and then by the celebrated Dr Alastair Mackenzie in 1925. A unique feature of the course layout is that 90 per cent of it can be seen from the clubhouse.

"Situated on a chalk base, we don't have too many serious problems. Like all coastal courses, you have to be on your guard against leatherjacket invasion and be prepared to take immediate control measures before serious



Peter Negus (right) and staffmen R. Charman, J. Dean and L. Bennett.



damage is done," Peter said. "Another factor we have to contend with is the wind. Spraying, fertilising, etc, have to be done early in the day as calm periods are often few and far between.

"The free-draining land makes the course playable all the year round, which means more play when neighbouring courses are closed. I also find that grass growth tends to continue well into the end of the year.

"I have an excellent relationship with the members, club secretary and green committee, who have seen how the benefits of careful planning and investment in the course over the past few years have raised the standard of the maintenance programme.

"At one time, topdressing was done infrequently. Now it is carried out four times a year. Having modern trailers and a mechanical bucket for the tractor allows all construction work to be undertaken by the greenkeeping staff instead of relying on contractors who are often unskilled.

"We have provided the professional with a practice ground by re-routing the 18th fairway and construction of new tees and bunker improvements have been extensive, but there is still a lot to be done.

"Equipment sheds have been improved to provide a machinery maintenance workshop separate

from the storage area and greenkeepers' messroom and staff numbers have been increased from three to four.

"Our range of machinery consists of a Ford 3000 Tractor with mounted 5/7 gang units for fairways and semi-rough, which are mowed with this equipment between April and October after which we use a set of Ransomes trailer gangs to eliminate tractor wheel marks. We also have a Hayter Rotary for the semi-rough.

"We possess two Ransomes 171 hydraulic triplex mowers, both in excellent order and used mostly for tees, aprons and verticutting, and a spare set of ten-bladed greens units mow the greens about a dozen times a year.

### Hand-mowers

"Most green cutting is done with hand-mowers daily with the Ransomes Auto Certes. Cutting the greens at weekends entails an early start, but it is well worth the effort to present a smooth, sleek putting surface. Since adopting the policy of using pedestrian mowers two years ago, I am convinced it has resulted in a much higher standard of greensward.

"We have a Kubota four-wheel drive 27hp tractor, which is indispensable for construction work and well able to cope with the terrain's hilly nature. A

Cushman with all the necessary attachments has helped revolutionise many routine jobs.

"Last winter, we decided to improve one of our deep bunkers by revetting, Scottish style, the face with turf. The major problem was calculating the amount of turf required. After enquiries, I could not find a company able to supply turf at the desired thickness of two inches. Our course is a very compact layout with virtually no spare ground to lift turf. Eventually, it was decided to use a certain area, the only one available, after which it could be reseeded with a bent/fescue mixture and maintained as a turf nursery.

"The first step was preparing the bunker face. Then we made a simple wooden frame to help us build the wall at the correct angle of 65°. The frame consisted of two 2 x 1in pieces of wood, one length 7ft, the other 4ft, fixed together with a strengthener at the correct angle. A right angle was made with the two pieces of wood and a spirit level was attached to the 4ft piece. When the 4ft length was level, the 7ft one was at the correct angle to lay against the face of the wall.

"A foundation trench was excavated along the base of the bunker face. Dealing with the chalk's uncertain friable nature, it was not easy to prepare a smooth, level surface to lay the turf against. Next, we systematically



**Peter Negus.**

began to lay the back end of each turf in firm contact with the chalk wall. Where this was not possible, soil was rammed down at the back of the turf to fill any voids. The turf was laid in brick fashion using a turf mallet.

"As the wall grew, we gradually came in from the sides to achieve the desired shape. After reaching the required height, the surrounding surface areas were blended to complement the bunker. A ramp was constructed at the base and sand added.

"This was our first attempt at bunker revetting with turf and we learned a lot in the process. For instance, the slope of the ramp up the face was not sufficient to allow a fair recovery shot from the bunker floor. We have since altered this and made the floor more concave. We also adjusted the angle to about 60° by trimming back the turf wall with a sharp spade.

"After a few months, problems arose due to the turf wall being backed against the chalk. Soil used to fill the voids filtered through the chalk and gaps began to appear at the top of the bunker, but this has all been dealt with. The bunker is a great success, but whether we would build another would depend on availability of turf."

Peter supports the formation of one new greenkeeping association. "The bigger we are, the better and the more united a front we present, the more our views will be respected by everyone in the game."

He is also a firm believer in greenkeeper training. "All our



**Old turf stripped from original bunker face in preparation.**



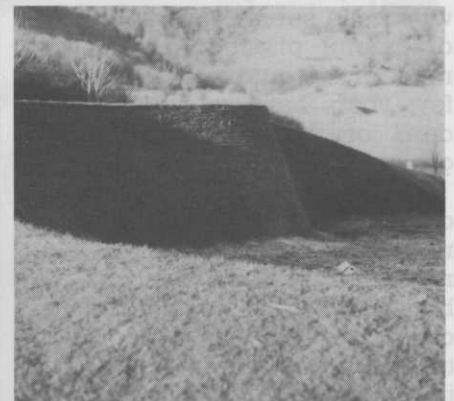
**Bank shaped and base ready for first row of turf. A wooden frame was constructed to maintain the correct wall face angle.**



**Several rows of turf laid in early stages of construction.**



**Final rows of turf laid. Edges were stepped down to allow for shaping.**



**The completed job!**

staff have attended educational courses at some stage. The younger ones obtained City and Guilds 1 and 2 in greenkeeping. I also attended college for a phase 3 certificate.

"In Sussex, we have Plumpton College and were lucky to have

Nick Rigden responsible for so much greenkeeper training. Sadly for us, he has moved on to pastures new. I think a good college training, combined with experienced practical background, helps produce first-class greenkeepers."