

# Out On The Course

**John Campbell meets  
fellow Scot Eddie  
Denton, head  
greenkeeper at  
Brocton Hall GC...**

"If there is a lovelier clubhouse or a prettier course in the Midlands, then I have yet to find it," wrote the late Tom Scott, editor of *Golf Illustrated*, about Brocton Hall Golf Club, Stafford. The mansion house, for generations the home of the Chetwynd family, dates back to George I and his successor, who frequently stayed there. It is said a ghost haunts the clubhouse, though few confess to having seen it!

The magnificent estate was once part of the great forest of Cannock Chase used by hunters centuries ago. The course, designed by Harry Vardon, opened for play in 1924. The terrain is gently undulating and numerous specimen trees lend an enchantment and serenity to the golfing scene.

The course is kept in immaculate condition by head greenkeeper Eddie Denton, 50, an erudite Scot who loves his job and is blessed with the keen perceptive eye of a good greenkeeper and a countryman's natural intuition for the land.

"When my brother-in-law mov-



**Head greenkeeper Eddie Denton.**



**The stately clubhouse at Brocton Hall Golf Club.**

ed from Scotland to become pro/greenkeeper at Brocton Hall, I decided to pack up my apprenticeship in engineering to join him as assistant greenkeeper in 1954. I have remained here ever since," Eddie said. "I was never wildly ambitious and little realised that I would eventually become head greenkeeper. My wife Joyce is a local girl and we have two grown-up daughters, Susan and Helen. My main hobbies are fishing, gardening and golf, although I don't play as much as I would like to.

"I love Brocton Hall. It has always been a beautiful place to me and that's probably the reason why I have remained here. I am particularly fond of the back half of the course. There's a special kind of magic round about the 12th, 13th and so forth. The abundance of water and trees create a unique atmosphere and character.

"I have always believed that golf courses should be run by those appointed to the different departments - the steward in charge of the clubhouse and

catering, the pro selling golf equipment and giving lessons and the head greenkeeper being fully responsible for the course. Sometimes, there are too many self-appointed experts - if a club has 600 members, they may all consider themselves well informed about the jobs of stewards, professionals and greenkeepers.

"A few years ago, we decided to make proper temporary greens for use during frost in the winter. We spent more time grooming these areas and gave them virtually the same treatment as the greens throughout the growing season - they have been a great success and the members comment on how good they are now.

"But, obviously, by the end of the winter, they show the effects of all the wear and tear they get during prolonged periods of frost. When we cease to use them in the spring, they soon recover with a bit of rest and renovation and are ready for service the following winter.

"The other main objective now achieved is a decent winter tee at



**The 18th fairway at Brocton Hall.**

every hole. In the past, we resorted to rubber mats, which were never popular. When we used the main tees during the dormant period, they generally took a lot of stick and were never really in a good shape for the start of the busy playing season. Good tees for winter play are a real bonus - they keep the golfers happy and allow us to present better conditions all year round.

"Not long ago, we had a serious thatch problem on the greens, due mainly to lack of aeration and infrequency of topdressing. It took about three years to get rid of the thatch accumulation by a concentrated programme of slitting and hollow-tining, combined with four to five annual topdressing applications.

"We cut back severely on irrigation and drastically reduced the amount of fertiliser, all of which made a marvellous transformation to the eventual quality of the putting surface. Last year, the greens only had one very light fertiliser application in the spring and they remained in pretty good shape for the rest of the year.

"Greenkeepers now are more aware of the treatment required to produce vigorous healthy turf capable of withstanding regular heavy punishment. Gone are the days when unlimited fertiliser was banged on to satisfy the whims of some influential club official without consideration for the long-term consequences.

"Automatic irrigation systems are regarded more as management tools now, to be used with great discretion. Many have learned their lessons the hard way and come to realise the quickest way to ruin turf can be brought about by the excessive



**Tidy turf revetment in the face of a big bunker...**

use of water and fertiliser high in phosphates and potash.

"As I said, everybody seems to think they can do the job better than those officially appointed by the club. When you are in the business of catering for the spor-



**The bank of a ditch is improved for a smart appearance and to ease maintenance.**



**A lake comes into play on the 9th.**

ting ambitions of all kinds of golfer, you can expect to be criticised occasionally. Golfers are very fickle at times. If they have a good game, they will sing the course's praises, but those who play badly may seek to justify their poor performance by finding something to complain about.

"I suppose it is the nature of the way golf is played that the greens attract the most comment, favourable or otherwise. We often hear golfers say: 'the greens are too hard, put more water on them!' They equate hard surfaces with dry greens and soft surfaces with wet greens.

"If they play their shot improperly with low trajectory and it fails to pull up on the putting surface, they immediately assume the green is too dry! Golfers don't appreciate that the maintenance of greens is not so much to make it a good landing area as a true putting surface and to do this we have to gear our efforts to keeping turf firm and the surface fast and true.

"Therefore, a good putting surface does not necessarily display the characteristics of a receptive landing area for a dropping golf ball. Regular aeration and topdressing does help to produce a good surface with the kind of resilience in the turf that will absorb the bounce and take the spin of a properly played golf ball.

"I have a deputy and three assistant greenkeepers, who are all good reliable workers with an enthusiastic interest in the operation and running of the course. We are fairly well-equipped, with a Cushman turf management system that includes a spiker,

*Continued overleaf...*



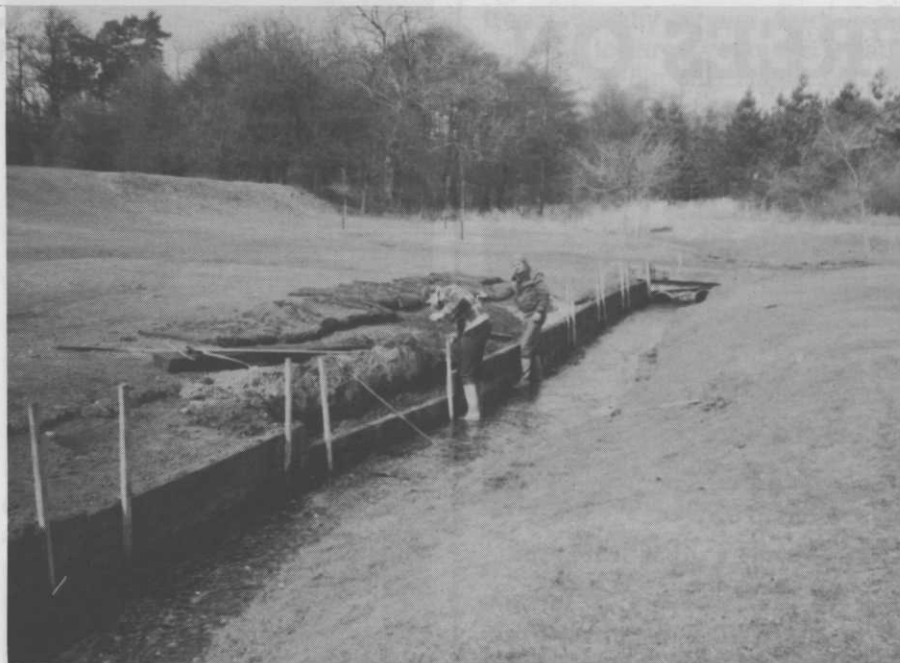


Eddie heads a jovial greenstaff at the Brocton Hall club.

hollow-tiner and topdresser; two Ransomes Triplex greens mowers; a Ransomes 180 with two sets of cutting units; three tractors, all fairly old; a set of Ransomes hydraulic five-gang mowers for the fairways and a set of trailed gangs for the semi-rough.

"We have a Sisis outfield spiker for the fairways, a Litamisa for leaf sweeping and collection, as well as an assortment of small machines, such as Flymos and trimmers. We recently purchased a Lawn Genie.

"We have spent some time this winter tidying up the banks of ditches intersecting the fairways. Traffic on these slopes has led to



Railway timbers were used on the bank of a ditch cutting across the 12th hole.

some deterioration in the turf's condition - there are ruts and other unplayable lies to frustrate golfers. We are in the process of building permanent retaining walls with railway timbers to present a neater appearance and reduce the amount of hand work required to maintain these drainage channels. We are also clearly defining the edge of the water hazard in compliance with the rules of golf, which will please all our golfers.

"A couple of alterations to our par-three 17th have also been carried out. The tee has been resited, bringing a lovely old stone tower dovecote building partly into play. An approach

bunker guarding the entrance to the green now has to be carefully negotiated. We have also altered the course of a winding stream and drained an old pond area to improve the aesthetic appearance of this area.

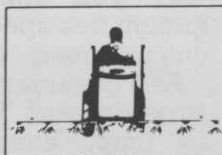
"Most greenkeepers would agree that the autumn and winter months are often the busiest period for the outdoor staff at every golf club. This is the only time we usually get to carry out important construction work and other necessary tasks to improve the course and facilitate more economical upkeep. Golfers who think we spend most of our time in the sheds through the winter months are mistaken!"

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