

HEAVEN



It's more than just a golf course: Donnington Grove exists to strengthen cultural links between Japan and Britain, as Chris Boiling reports from 'Parasampia'

All the stationery, leaflets and scorecards from Donnington Grove, the year-old course near Newbury, carry the word Parasampia. There is even talk about changing the parkland course's name to Parasampia which, in Sanskrit, means "distant heavenly place".

Parasampia is the word the golf course owners, Shi-tennoji International Limited, use to describe their activities.

Many British greenkeepers work for Japanese bosses, but David Winterton and his team of seven greenstaff must be the only ones who work for a company which started out as a Buddhist temple.

The Shi-tennoji Temple at Osaka is Japan's oldest temple. It was founded in 593

by Prince Shotoku, the father of Japanese Buddhism. Today Shi-tennoji also runs the International Buddhist University with campuses in Hawaii, Austria and Belgium, four old people's homes, a hospital, four homes for the physically and mentally handicapped, four nursery schools, a residential home for mothers and children, two high schools and a junior school. In England it owns a co-educational boarding school near Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk with the majority of pupils coming from Japan. One of the aims of the school is to increase cultural exchange between Japan and Britain.

The 18-hole 6,781-yard course, clubhouse and 27-bedroom hotel performs a similar role. "Important though the recreational

facilities are, Shi-tennoji, as a religious and cultural foundation, would not have embarked on this development were it not for the opportunities for cultural exchange," says the Reverend Zenro Morita. "As newcomers to this lovely part of England, we hope to establish many friendships between British and Japanese people, thus contributing to increased understanding and goodwill between our two great nations."

That's why, despite its appearance, it is not an exclusive club. There are 300 local members and "day members" pay just £15.

Base in cultural triangle

Shi-tennoji also run the Parasampia Travel Club whose members wanted somewhere to

ON EARTH



Course manager David Winterton by the Japanese temple at Donnington Grove Country Club

stay in the cultural triangle formed by Stratford-on-Avon, Bath and London. Somewhere about an hour from Heathrow.

Donnington Grove, a "Strawberry Hill Gothic" mansion built in about 1770, was bought in 1991 for this purpose. It is believed Mick Jagger was also interested in the property. The mansion and part of the 550-acre estate were turned into Donnington Grove Country Club, which boasts a Japanese-run hotel and a superb Dave Thomas-designed golf course. About £20 million was spent on the project, most going on the hotel with its 29 bedrooms, Japanese restaurant, Japanese baths, and saunas. About £2m went on the golf course, £1.5m went on a temple (with Japanese craftsmen flown in to construct it) and gardens, and about £300,000 has been spent on machinery.

Course manager David Winterton, 35, has

just taken on a seventh greenkeeper. In the summer he also employs two casual workers to keep the course.

There is also a full-time mechanic who runs his own show. "He has been set up to run the workshop as a separate unit," says David, "Therefore he has his own budget with a system set up so he charges his time out to the jobs he does. Parts and stock are supplied by myself. This is a trial run but is working well. Basically it is to prove that a full-time mechanic can earn his existence in a cost-effective and hopefully economical way. Each month a budget update sheet is produced by the accounts department for the workshops plus the golf course, gardens and farm. The mechanic spends 90 per cent of his time on course machinery but also works on estate/farm/garden machinery. He is good at fabrication and has good facilities with oxyacetylene, mig welder, plasma

'All is not perfect in this distant heavenly place. As with any new course, there are teething troubles'

cutter, special benches for setting up cylinder heads etc."

The estate and gardens are groomed by a head gardener and four assistant gardeners. There is also an estate manager and three estate personnel.

The estate manager, head gardener and course manager report directly to the general manager, Mr Eiichi Tanaka. All major financial decisions are made by the directors in Japan who include Mr Juntoku Deguchi, 'The Headmaster'. They have the final say: "If they agree with whatever you want to purchase or change, then you can. But there's no bartering. If they say 'No', they mean no."

But David adds: "They have been very generous."

His budget for '94/95 is £315,000 of which £120,000 will be spent on labour, £45,000 on chemicals and fertilisers, £30,000 on water and irrigation, with the rest going on machinery, clothing, college tuition, machinery repairs and spares.

Jobs to do

It sounds wonderful so far, doesn't it? But all is not perfect in this distant heavenly place. As with any new course, there are teething troubles and several things to do to improve the course still further.

A year after opening, they have decided to replace all the woodchip buggy paths with 5mm sponge gravel. This is because, in many areas, especially on the second nine, the rain washes the woodchip away.

About 6,000m of paths were laid with hardwood walk chips

because the local council wanted the course to remain as natural-looking as possible but, as David points out: "It was a complete disaster as the woodchip did not firm down." The council is now considering the change. (The buggy path is a concession to the Japanese owners and Japanese visitors as the majority of local and day members prefer to walk the course - a mighty health-inducing 5.5 miles.)

Other work at the moment includes overseeding, hollow tining and topdressing.

Last month (August) the greenstaff began their autumn maintenance programme by overseeding greens

with a similar seed mixture to the original.

The greens and tees were sown originally with British Seed Houses seed.

The greens were 40% Frida chewing fescue, 40%

Ruffilla slender creeping red fescue, 10% Egmont Agrostis and 10% Highland Agrostis. The tees were 80% fescue types, 10% smoothstalk and 10% Agrostis and are being overseeded with a similar mixture with less fescue but including a dwarf rye seed.

After hollow-tining they topdress lightly with Isolite, a product which retains moisture and releases it when the grass roots require it. They are also lightly topdressing with Biogrounds-keeper from Liquid Sod to get a true organic feed into the surface for microbial activity. This is followed by rootzone topdressing, overseeding and they keep it well watered for three weeks. "This should set the greens up well for the winter period," says David. The tees

DONNINGTON FACT
'Beau' Brummell, the famous dandy, was brought up at the mansion

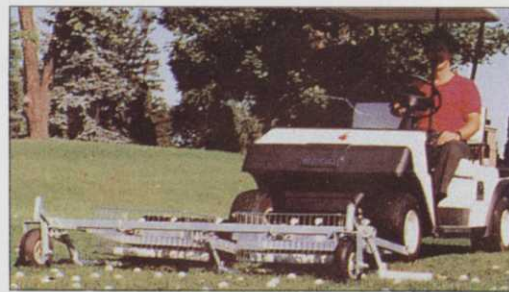


THE ANSWER TO YOUR SUMMER AERATION PROBLEMS



The RTS "Sarel Type" Roller
A pedestrian model is also available

THE ANSWER TO YOUR GOLF BALL COLLECTING PROBLEMS



The Acrow Ballpicker
A pedestrian model is also available



RISBORO' TURF

CHINNOR ROAD, BLEDLow, PRINCES RISBOROUGH
AYLESBURY, BUcKS, HP17 9PH
TEL: PRINCES RISBOROUGH (0844) 274127 FAX: (0844) 274191

Contact us for the name of your nearest dealer or a demo

AD
REF
386

will receive similar management.

Over the next three years they also hope to topdress the back nine fairways twice a year "as the levels on these are not too good," explains David. "More soil was moved during construction to create interesting designs but with poor soil it has not settled well." The 588-yard 11th was so bad they had to plough it up and returf it six weeks before the opening of the course.

The fairways and approaches also need to be vertidraind as they are still too compact from construction work a year on. This was due to a lot of work being carried out in the adverse conditions of the winter of 92/93 causing serious loss of structure and drainage to the land in general.

About 2 ha of wild flower areas are to be created on the top course to give a variety of colour throughout the season. The mixture will contain meadow cranes bill, oxeye daisy, common knapwood, black medick, scabious, self heal, yellow rattle, wild angelica, red campion, wil-

migonette, mixed with gorse, broom and possibly heathers. Heathers have already been planted but were devastated by rabbits, which are now being controlled.

The banks of the three small lakes on the lower course are to be planted with *Juncus effusus* 'spiralis', bulrushes, red poas, sedges, water dropworts and

yellow flags.

More trees are to be planted, too. A lot of trees have already been planted by Civic Trees (which is also looking after them on a two-year contract which finishes this winter). The sheltered belts already planted to screen the long-awaited Newbury bypass have thickened up well, so they may be able to transplant

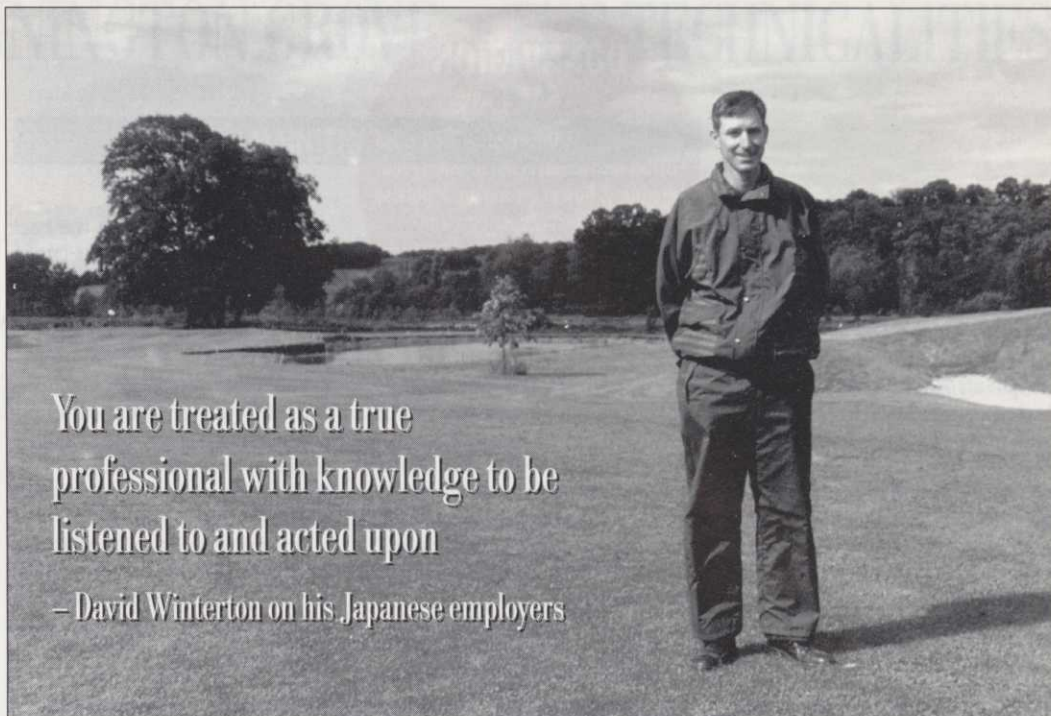
from these onto the course.

More drainage is also required, especially to relieve the water that settles in the buggy paths which were put in after the main construction. Additional drainage is also required in front of some greens, due mainly to settlement of the land.

Another big job this winter is tee building. Many of the tees,

You are treated as a true professional with knowledge to be listened to and acted upon

— David Winterton on his Japanese employers



COMPACTION? POOR DRAINAGE? POOR GROWTH?

Are you experiencing any of these problems with your Sports Fields, Greens, Cricket Squares, Landscapes, Trees?

Call for the Terralift • Use the Terralift Sub-Soil Restructuring Service

The Terralift also incorporates soil conditioners and root feeds trees. The probe can reach 1m or 1.5m depths.



C & P SOILCARE LIMITED, Unit 3, Bush Farm, Nedging, Ipswich, Suffolk IP7 7BL. Telephone/Fax: 0449 741012

Recommendations, demonstrations and free site visits available.

AD
REF
46

NEW from

MULTI-CORE

The superb TMI 500 Greens/Fairway Aerator



- 1.5 metre coring width
- Variable spacing with a choice of tine sizes. Hollow or solid tine.
- Productivity. 67,000 square feet per hour at 2.6MPH.
- Adjustable depth. Depth capacity to 5 inches.
- Durability. Robust all steel welded frame
- No grease points. Fully sealed throughout.
- Fits your tractor. From 22HP gearbox or hydrostatic.

MULTI-CORE

3 Hillside Close, Euxton, Chorley, Lancs PR7 6JB
Tel/Fax: (0257) 231861

For Ireland please contact:
Croft Turfgrass Industries,
Greencroft, Castlebellingham,
Co. Louth. Tel: 010 353 427 2163

AD
REF
347

DONNINGTON FACT

As well as golf, Donnington Grove also offers instruction in the Japanese tea ceremony, flower arranging, Japanese cuisine, archery, origami and meditation. Attendance doesn't contribute to your Master Greenkeeper Certificate...

especially on the par 3s, are proving too small which may mean resorting to mats. David would prefer larger tees that the members could stay on all year.

A putting green near the golf shop – all 700 sq m of it – is to be built from scratch and a 500 sq m turf nursery is to be constructed on the flatter lower parkland course. This will be maintained the same as the greens and tees and will help make the course truly heaven on earth, especially for the greenstaff who are enjoying the experience of working for Buddhist bosses.

18-handicapper David has worked on a lot of golf courses since he left school in '76, but this is the first Japanese company he has worked for. After leaving school he took a two-year apprenticeship in forestry and landscape with a development corporation in Peterborough. This included working on a municipal course, Thorpe Wood, under David Walden. "I realised this was for me", he said. But he went back to school – as a grounds-

man, then went to Myerscough College and took an OND in turf-culture. One of his work placements was at Alton Meadows, another course supervised by David Walden. Then he got into greenkeeping proper with a full-time job at Thorpe Wood where he stayed for three years before moving on to help build a course at Toft House Hotel, in Lincolnshire. Once that was built he went to Ramsey GC, Cambridgeshire, to become head greenkeeper. Three and a half years later he quit to do some travelling. He got back into greenkeeping by growing in Greethan Valley GC, Leicestershire and in '92 he went to Castle Coombe for a short stint before joining Donnington Grove in February '93, taking over the final growing-in phase from Mike Bottomley. The first nine holes

opened in June '93 with the back nine opening three months later.

David says he has a great team at Donnington Grove and that he is enjoying the experience of working for a Japanese outfit. "They allow you to use your professional judgement to the full and you are treated as a true professional with knowledge to be listened to and acted upon," he said.

One thing he has noticed is that "they don't like to say 'No'. That sounds great, doesn't it? But it doesn't mean that I get what I ask for because they don't say yes either.

"But they expect perfection, especially in the way the course is presented. At times I've been struggling with the appearance of the course. We've got the machinery but the men don't stretch to it. It's not the greens and tees, but the general look – we can only manicure to a point, we just can't quite get that wonderful finish that the Japanese want. They want the best, and I like that, but they're not always willing to pay

for it. And they won't pay for it until they can see it's obvious that, yes, he needs more manpower." (Since I visited the course they've increased the manpower and machinery "to get the presentation they require").

The main areas that appeared to be suffering when I was there were the bunkers which required hand-cutting. The grass on the mounds was longer than desired and prevented the ball from rolling into the sand. David would also have liked to verti-cut more frequently. But there is only so much seven men can do in a day. With the 18 holes set in 170 acres, there is a lot of grass to manage, which is why they have been planting more trees, shrubs and wild flowers.

A couple of other differences David has noted with working for a Japanese company is that "they require a great deal of flexibility in view of working hours and they often expect the team to do other tasks when the occasion arises. But they are always fair."



Relief grinding attachment

Electric drive lifting table

KEEPING DONNINGTON GROVE – THE TECHNICALITIES

AUTUMN MAINTENANCE PROGRAMME

Greens

1. Scarify to 5mm depth. Remove debris.
2. Hollow-tine greens using Sisis Varicore.
3. Topdress over holes with 2x25kg Biogroundkeeper (dried poultry manure) to increase bacteria activity in surface + 2x25kg Isolite, a Japanese product which helps to retain moisture.
4. Dragmat these products into holes – get these to bottom of holes.
5. Topdress with 90% sand, 10% peat mixture (RBL double-washed sand/Thameside peat) – 3kg/m²
6. Overseed onto topdressing with fescue/bent mix (60/40) – 30gms/m².
7. Dragmat seed/topdressing into surface.
8. Irrigate.
9. Leave uncut for two days, cut at 5.5mm after this.
10. Apply Rigby Taylor special organic N 8.0.5 0.5 + 2% Fe at 35gms/m² – a half rate

dose. Irrigate in.

11. In late September will apply Rigby Taylor organic feed – A/W2 4.4.8 + 2%Fe.
12. Apply light topdressing – 1.5-2kg/m² some time in September.
13. Raise height of cut to 6.5mm for winter.

Tees

1. Hollow-tine and remove cores.
2. Topdress – 2kg/m²
3. Overseed at 30gms/m² – mix dwarf ryegrass, creeping fescue, bent and smoothstalk.
4. Topdress again lightly – 1.5-2kg/m²
5. Apply Sierrablen autumn feed – 15.0.22 + 1%F
6. Raise height of cut to 12mm. Will rest par 3 tees by using mats.

Due to drought, many areas of fairway, semi and rough require following work:

1. Scarify thin or dead patches. Some of these patches exist

due to extensive kill of clover patches. Use Sisis Veemo behind tractor.

2. Litamiser used to sweep up debris.
3. Overseed using mechanical seeder, possibly a pedestrian overseeder.
4. Topdress.
5. Should not require fertiliser due to Sierrablen feed applied in early spring – 22.5.7 which has an 8-9 month release. If fertiliser is required, will apply Mascot Microfine 4.0.8 + 2%Fe + 2%mg.
6. Divot all fairways in late September/early October.
7. Fairway height of cut raised to 200mm.

Tee/green banks and apron

1. Scarify/overseed any bare areas due to weed kill/drought in places.
2. Topdress these areas with complete topdressing of tee banks.
3. Apply Mascot Microfine 4.0.8 + 2%Fe + 2%mg. 35gms/m²

Other autumn works

1. Prepare areas of grassland for autumn sowing of wild flower seed by a) spraying off grass with total herbicide (roundup); b) cultivate area after removing majority of grass; c) Sow wild flower seed.
2. Mark trees which have died due to drought so they can be replaced in the winter – possibly remove completely.
3. Sow seeds for wild flowers/water plants around the margins of the three lakes on the course.

Feeding the soil

Soil tests showed the lower nine holes to be nutrient rich with fairway pH of approximately 7 and greens and tees at a healthy average of 5.7. "The pH of 5.7 I will try to keep to stop take-all developing in the greens. This will be aided by applying low doses of liquid sulphur and iron every six to eight weeks," says David.

More on Page 29

MAKE PEACE WITH YOUR GREENKEEPER...

Order an Atterton for him this season.

He worried the life out of all the committee members and kept on complaining about sending out his cylinders for grinding.

He told everyone about the attributes of an Atterton grinder, how you can grind in-situ with the cutter unit still in the machine.

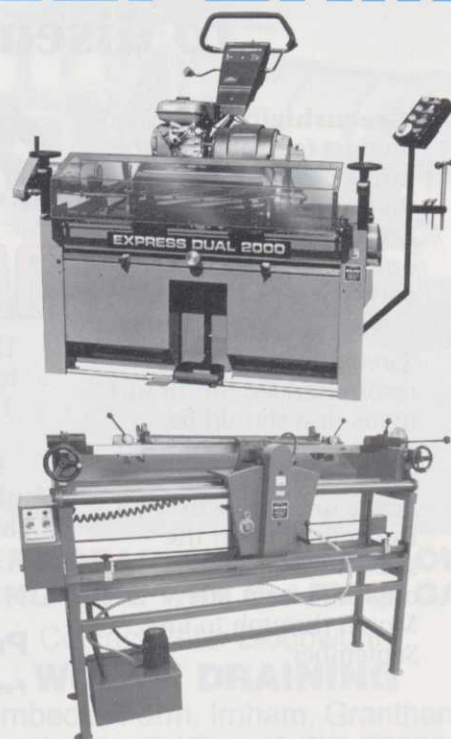
How you can grind the cylinder separately when the machine's stripped down for maintenance.

How there's a new model out with a relief grinding attachment and an electric drive lifting platform to get those heavy old gang units up onto the grinding table.

How there's a bottom blade grinder that made the ideal pair and how the pair of them would enable him to keep his cutter units and the course in tip top condition.

How they're both the best in the business and he wanted 'em bad!

We made peace with our greenkeeper – do the same and you'll see how an Atterton reduces service account costs and provides real benefits to your greenkeeper and the course!



ATTERTON & ELLIS LTD
Manufacturers of Fine Grinders for over 100 years

Iron Works, Haverhill, Suffolk, CB9 8QH
Tel: 0440 702312 Fax: 0440 712138

'The majority of local and day members walk the course – a health-inducing 5.5 miles'

Nutrition of the course is as follows:

Greens – approx 350kg/ha N, 50kg/ha P and 240kg/ha K using a mixture of Rigby Taylor feeds, namely Microfine 18.0.0+6%Fe, Microfine 14.4.7 + 2%mg and Microfine 4.0.8 + 4%Fe + 2%mg. They are also spraying a Japanese product called Minox, a liquid sulphur/iron plus micronutrients. In the spring they use Farmura Portcawl and in the autumn/winter Vitax iron and nitrogen and Rigby Taylor SRD, an organic supplement containing foodstuffs for bacteria/fungi in soil profile. They are experimenting with a new Scotsturf product on two greens – 32.3.10 Drill fertiliser. A few other clubs are also trialling this product which will be marketed after analysis of data next year.

Tees – Sierrablen Mini 22.3.7 which gives "excellent results, good sward cover". In the autumn they apply slow release Sierrablen. They also spray with a sulphur/iron mixture and Farmura Portcawl.

Fairways/semi-rough – Use a new Sierrablen product, 27.5.7 – an 8-9 month release. This is spread in February to last the whole growth season. Four fairways have a different feed regime (all Rigby Taylor products) to compare the results. In the spring these receive Microfine 14.4.7 + 2%mg followed in the height of summer by a slow release liquid 18.3.6 + micronutrients, 28.0.0. In late summer they receive 15.0.10 + Fe.

Topdressing

The greens and tees topmix is 90% Roffey Brothers double washed sand and 10% peat from Thameside. Both these products were laboratory tested – the peat for pH and organic matter value, the sand for hydraulic conductivity, particle sizes, pH, lack of lime. "They work very well indeed, having been built on a gravel raft system with a grit blinding layer.

The topdressing now used is exactly the same mixture and materials as used originally. They are sourced the same, bought in bulk loads and mixed on site with



Donnington Grove's own JCB. Tildenet netting is used to establish the more difficult areas, eg banks, rabbit damage areas on the greens and tees.

Bunker sand

There are 68 bunkers on the course which required 2,500 tons of sand. Some of the bunkers are very large. One is 300 sq m and took 200 tons of sand. The sand used is Kingsley fine washed. "An excellent sand, but it requires a year to settle down properly. However, it's good after that," says David.

Irrigation

Installed by TIS, the Toro system uses a SC 3000 control panel, two main pumps plus a booster pump for the upper course. The system is designed to apply 32mm in seven days to greens, 25mm in seven days to tees, and 19mm in seven days to approaches. The greens have four and the approaches have one Toro 658 Series electric valve in head, twin speed sprinklers. The tees use 700 series, there is also a manual hose point by each tee and green.

The reservoir holds 5 million cubic metres of water, filled by extraction from the River Lambourn via a chamber pump underground. It is filled, according to the terms of their licence, between October and March.

One of the most time-consuming jobs has been lowering the sprinklers and most of the control

boxes as the ground shrunk after construction.

Cutting heights

Greens – 5mm in the summer,

8mm last winter, 7mm this winter; fairways – 20mm; semis – 1.5ins; rough – mostly 2.5in, the 5in areas are to become wild flower areas.

WORTH DRAINING



VERTIDRAINING and HOLLOW CORING HIRE with the RYAN GA 30

Contact Peter Bloodworth

WORTH DRAINING

Cornbecks Farm, Irnham, Grantham, Lincolnshire Tel/Fax: (0476) 550266

AD
REF
467