A farming family has turned its land into a golf course. Charlesland Golf and Country Club Hotel opened two years ago. How are they adjusting to the change and coping with greenkeeping? And what does their spring maintenance programme entail? Chris Boiling went to the Republic of Ireland to find out.

When you look at a map of Ireland and see where Greystones is – on the coast 18 miles south east of Dublin – you expect the town’s newest course to be a links. Indeed it’s on the same coast as Portmarnock –
but further south. The 3rd, 4th and 6th tees at Charlesland Golf and Country Club Hotel are only 20 yards from the beach, but it's not a links course. The former arable farm has been turned into a parkland course.

However it doesn't look like a parkland course. The cold wind from the Irish Sea discourages tree growth. There are some oaks, some as old as 300 years, but they're not as big as you'd expect them to be. 4,000 trees were planted when the course was built a few years ago, but they're little more than knee-high and hard to spot.

The fact that it is neither a links nor a parkland course to be takes nothing from this 6739-yard (6159m) par 72 challenge. It is a charming course with several great holes.

Chrisy O'Connor Sr loves the 11th. It's a 338m par 4 that dog-legs left with a river running across the fairway at 220 yards. Anyone playing too safe or too left from the tee will be left with a difficult second shot over the largest trees on the course.

I liked the stroke index 1 16th. It's uphill all way and it dog-legs to the right. With anything other than a straight-down-the-middle drive, you're left with a blind shot to the green. A good drive is rewarded with a lovely view of the pin through a valley which gives the hole its name - Torry's Canyon (named after the digger operator who dug out approximatley 32,000 tonnes of soil from this area. This was later used for the sub-bases of most of the tees and greens.)

Veteran Irish designer Eddie Hackett's signature hole is the unlucky-for-some 13th - the longest par 3 you can get. What makes the hole a little less daunting is the high tee - the highest point on the course - which offers splendid views from Howth to Wicklow Head and the little 13th green 250 yards away and 120ft below.

The other three par 3s are all relatively short - 130-140m from the back tees - but all face different directions. The 17th is course director Clive Evans' favourite hole "because the green cost the most to build." In a dip that collects water, the green was built up using 5,000 tonnes of material in the base. Two 9in water pipes were put in below this in addition to the usual greens drainage. This drains into a man-made lake beside the green, which makes it a very pretty hole. The clubhouse can be seen in the distance behind it.

In the distance because the 18th at 615 yards (562m) is one of the longest holes in Ireland. A double dog-leg, the positioning of the second shot is crucial, otherwise you may find yourself having to carry one of the two small lakes that guard the green.

The greens were among the first true USGA-spec greens in Ireland. They are now four years old and starting to come good. They dry very quickly and are playable all year round. In fact the course only closed for one day last year. This is not just because of the sand greens but also because of the drainage put in during construction. 20,000 tonnes of drainage gravel and 6km of pipes are now paying for themselves.

Wet spots
When the Evans family decided to turn their farm into an 18-hole golf course with a 12-bedroom hotel, they had a great advantage. They had been working the land all their lives so they knew all the wet spots. Eddie Hackett was asked to design round these and turn the worst spots into four water hazards.

Where he couldn't design around them, they put in extra drainage and dumped tonnes of sand. On the upper part of the 16th fairway there are drains approximatley every 4m. On the 10th fairway they tipped 60 tonnes of sand. "Work on the 10th is on-going as what was a bog for thousands of years cannot be changed overnight," commented Clive. "But we are changing it from a wet meadow to a meadow beside a lake."

The land was passed on to 50-year-old Clive's father by an uncle. But while 350 acres was a fine provider for Lewis Evans, his wife Mai and three children - Clive, Lance and Wilson - it was more difficult for the sons and their eight children to eke a living from it.

"We needed to do something more so we looked at this idea of turning it into a golf course," said Clive. "We didn't set out to have a hotel but we think the area is right for this sort of thing."

Youngest brother Lance, the only member of the family who was interested in golf beforehand, is the managing director. Eldest brother Wilson, a qualified accountant, is a director, and Clive, now a 26-handicapper, is in charge of the course. Under him is a qualified head greenkeeper, Sean Conroy, and four assistants.

Clive was also in charge of building the course, using his knowledge of the land, farm machinery and what he learned at BIGGA seminars and conferences.

The advantages of doing it
A family affair

themselves go beyond the obvi-
ous economics and the fact that
you know things are being done
correctly. The biggest advantage of
DIY course building, according
to Clive, is that you can build it so
it is easy to maintain afterwards.
"When we were building the
slopes we knew we'd be looking
after them every day of the year.
So maybe it took two or three
days longer to make a green, but
it was worth it."

It means they can cut all the
banks with machines and never
scalp the top of mounds.

As well as knowing the location
of the wet spots, Clive also knew
where the wildlife lived and was
able to avoid disturbing badgers'
burrows and foxes' converts.

Biggest problem

Their biggest problem during the
construction of the course was
the amount of stones on the site.
"There were so many that the
first agronomist said it wouldn't
be possible to make a golf course
where we wanted to. When I said
that to Eddie Hackett he thought
for a little while and then said,
'Why're you telling me that? God
made this land to be a golf
course, you've undertaken the job
to build the course, you deal with
the stones'.

Clive went to a show and
bought a Kverneland stone picker. He reckons it picked up a
100 tonnes of stones per acre.
The rest were buried with a Turfmech Rotadarion. The stones
that were stockpiled were put to
good use in drainage ditches and
soakpits.

A sandpit on the course has
also come in handy. After screen-
ing, the sand has been used on
tees and to topdress several fair-
ways, including the 10th. It's
been used despite a pH of 9.4. "I
know it breaks all the rules but
the agronomist was prepared to
make this land to be a golf
land." says Clive, although he is now
overseeding the heavy wear areas with dwarf
ryegrass.

The greens were also sown
with fescues and bents, but are
now 50/50 bents and Poa. The
greenstaff are overseeding with
bents.

The fine-tuning of the course
continues. A bunker was put in
on the 17th to stop mis-hit shots
reaching the green and further
bunkers are to be built on the
easier first nine to tighten up the
fairways. One big job on the
cards is building a "landing area"
on the 14th, which slopes
severely from left to right. "It is
the only hole on the course
that may break Eddie Hackett's golden
rule — 'The perfect shot should
never be penalised'," said Clive.

In the future the former farm-
ers may build another 18 Eddie
Hackett holes on their land and a
smaller clubhouse," said Clive.

SPRING
MAINTENANCE AT
CHARLESLAND

Drainage and aeration
In March we will Verti-drain
the greens for the first time.
Prior to this hollow-tining has
been sufficient. We will
topdress with silica sand
incorporating 25kgs of
seaweed meal per green and
overseed with bent.

Tees will be hollow-tined,
topdressed and overseeded
with dwarf perennial ryegrass.
Side of tees and heavy wear
areas will be aerated and
overseeded with dwarf
ryegrass. Groens and tees will
be sit weekly according to
weather conditions. Verti-

cutting will precede Verti-
drain. Heights of cut will be
at 5/16in prior to Verti-drain-
ing and greens will be mown two
or three times a week. The
height of the cut will gradually
be reduced down to 3/16 and
mown six times a week by the
beginning of May. Once the
mild weather and good
growth have come in (say by
the third week in March)
grooming will be carried out
every day.

Nutrition
Prior to Verti-drain, 165kgs/hec
of sulphated of potash and
145 kgs/hec of
super phosphate will be
applied. There will also be
an application of five star slow-
release nitrogen at 130
kgs/hec prior to Verti-
drain. Sulphate of iron will
be applied at one litre per
green. During the fourth
week in March 450 kg/hec of
Floranid slow release 20:5;6,2
will be applied. Six to eight
weeks later this will be
repeated. Five or six days
before open week we will
apply liquid fertiliser as a
boost. The tees will be given
Floranid at the same rate at
six to eight week intervals.

Disease and pest control
To prevent fusarium, Turfclear
will be applied prior to Verti-draining
and overseeding. Leatherjackets and
casting worms will be
controlled by using the same
product. We will alternate this
application with
the application of Rovral. All
young trees will be sprayed
around with round-up
Simazine in early March.