Scott MacCallum travels to England’s easterly most point to meet a man who eats, drinks and breathes his golf

Slice John Beamish through the middle and the drinkers among you may be a little disappointed. Instead of finding copious quantities of the black liquid with which he shares a name you are more likely to discover the words Rookery Park Golf Club. Because John Beamish is Rookery Park through and through.

He has worked for the Lowestoft club since 1964, been Head Greenkeeper since 1984 and when the course was relocated to its present site to make way for a housing development John bought one of the houses.

“I live on the 4th tee. I know that tree that overlooked the tee is still there,” laughed John, who is very open about the place the golf club holds in his life.

“I’m married to the golf course,” he says and it is not said a boast, just as a matter of fact statement. And it is obviously a happy union because John is held in such high regard that the Club Manager, David Kelly, nominated him for last year’s Toro Award for Excellence in Greenkeeping and a Highly recommended plaque now hangs in the clubhouse lounge.

“Mr Kelly kept it quite that he was nominating me and I only found out about it when he presented me with the forms. To tell you the truth I was apprehensive about the thought of being judged but I was really delight-
"The team is good because of everybody in it not because of any one person"

"At the moment I don’t know whether it is a bit like the King’s clothes and we’re being sold something we can’t see... although I’m sure eventually it will be the way we’ve got to go.”

"We try and keep the par-3 to the same standard as the main course but obviously the main course will always come first.

"We really are a grass factory because in the summer every part of the course has to be cut every week - and that’s without throwing fertiliser about.

"We can add to it but it is very much a framework which can’t be changed. A copy of this is given to new committee members so they don’t come in blind and know exactly where we are heading.

"This is a professional business now, it’s one of the main changes I’ve seen since I started. Everything we do has got to be done properly and to the ultimate standard."

The examination of that standard was thorough when Rookery Park played host to an East Anglia Section event last year and 60 greenkeepers converged on the course.
"I was a bit apprehensive but it was a good day for greenkeepers and a good day for our course. In fact they want to come back again this year. I do believe if you are pleased with your course in the season you should be pleased to show it off."

John is currently trying to get away from the use of fungicides and he is looking at the biological methods.

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"As it stands you've got to commit a certain amount of money to a programme which you must stick to, whereas with fungicide you only use what you feel you need. Having said that, I do think it's the way to go and I will keep track of it."

It is a pragmatic approach borne out of experience.

"Years ago I'd look at the latest machine, think it's wonderful, go for it and sometimes catch a cold so my philosophy is now to be a year to 16 months behind. I'll let others be the trail blazers."

On the construction front the team is currently working on a tee replacement programme - three per year.

"With so much play we need wider tees so that is what we are doing. All work is done in-house unless we need specialist skills or equipment," he explained.

Speaking with John Beamish it is easy to forget that he has 35 years in the industry as his enthusiasm and genuine love for what he is doing, and where he is going, shines through.