Scott MacCallum travelled to Portsmouth to see at first hand Southwick Park Naval Recreational Base's excellent new Course Management Centre

Ship shape at Southwick

Right: Rear Admiral J. Chadwick C.B. chats with Southwick Park's Head Greenkeeper Nick Beadle (centre) at the grand opening.

Below: A commemorative plaque marks the auspicious occasion.

It was a marvellous occasion. The sort of thing the Royal Navy does so well. Pomp, ceremony, precision timing and a decorated dignitary to say a few well chosen words and seal the moment with a well propelled bottle of champagne or, as on this occasion, a neatly snipped ribbon.

But this wasn’t the launch of a new frigate, nor was it the passing out parade for the season’s new officer cadets, but the opening of the brand new Course Management Centre at Southwick Park Naval Recreation Base, alongside HMS Dryad, near Portsmouth - the Navy’s own municipal golf club. The opening was carried out by Rear Admiral J. Chadwick C.B watched by several other high ranking Royal Navy Officers.

They also marked the end of an era during which the greenkeeping team had operated from three less than satisfactory buildings spread out over the golf course, a situation which did much to test the team’s survival instincts and little to extend the life of machinery.

The new facility includes all that could have been asked from a building and was achieved at a cost which didn’t make the Navy baulk.

The morale boost provided by the new accommodation was apparent as soon as I arrived. Surprised to see everything closed up I entered by the side door to find Head Greenkeeper Nick Beadle delivering a fine off break which assistant Simon Berry could only edge onto the back door of the main facility which, in the rules of the game, meant he was out caught behind.

I hasten to add that, in the interests of safety and damage limitation, a soft ball was in use.

“We like to play a bit of cricket at lunchtime or football, as we’ve got a goal down on the pitch and putt course,” explained Nick, who was blowing a bit after his bowling stint.
Equipment Inventory

**Tractor Units**
- Hayter 2248
- 2 John Deere 2053As
- Toro 218 D
- John Deere 455
- Husky Greenstar
- Huskey Huetruck
- LF3800
- Ford 1910
- Ford 1220
- 2 Kawasaki Mules

**Attachments**
- Bobcat Shredder/Chipper
- Charterhouse Rapid core
- Husky Toppresser
- Hand Sprayer
- Allman Sprayer
- Wessex Brickbox
- Wessex Tractor
- Wessex Potsaw
- Two Tonne Trailer
- Lewis Linsdigger 33
- John Deere Brush
- John Deere Blade
- LF3800
- Siiss Fairway Slitter
- Huskey Scallor
- Rotary Deck
- Huskey Back Box

**Hand Machinery**
- 4 Superlices
- GS66
- 2 Stihl Blowers
- Stihl Chainsaw
- Husyparama Chainsaw
- Robin Daggar
- Allen Stimmer
- Stihl Stimmer
- Allen Flymo
- Push Leafblower
- Jetstar Blower
- Hedge Cutter

**Suppliers**
- Tast
- Sherwater- Headland
- Avoncrop
- Grass Roots
- Righy Taylor
- Winchester Gdn Mach
- TH White
- DJ Scott

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"We have a rule that there is no smoking and we must change our footwear in the drying room and at the moment everyone is sticking to it," he explained as we sat in his well-appointed, and remarkably tidy, office.

The genuine enthusiasm and rapport within the team has been enhanced by the new living and working environment which is a far cry from what was in place before.

"We had three separate sites - the Top Shed, the Tea Shed and the Boat House. The Top Shed was made of tin and was old, rusty and small. We used to keep the greens mowers, two John Deeres; a Toro, a Hayter a Huck Track and two mules in there so we had seven or eight pieces of equipment stored in there. But it only had one door so we had to work out what we were going to do the day after then rearrange the machinery so the appropriate pieces were at the front. We also had the chemical safe up there," said Nick.

The Tea Shed, named after the favourite beverage of the occupants, looked like an old stone bothy and boasted stone floors and ivy growing through the roof.

"We kept the Certes in there as well as racks of hand tools while it was also our Mess Room. It was very cold in the winter and heaven knows how many heaters we got through."

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Obviously there is no real need for a boat house to be particularly water tight and, in this case while extremely attractive with the sun streaming through it, protection from the elements was not its strong suit.

"This was where we kept the big stuff," explained Nick.

As well as the obvious complications, being split over three sites was not ideal from a logistical point of view.

"I cut fairways there and it was a case of setting everyone up then going all the way down to the boat house to collect the equipment then going back up to cut the 1st and 3rd before golfers got out so it was about 20 minutes before I'd get any work done."

The catalyst for change came when the Navy's Establishment Safety Advisor, together with the Dryad's First Lieutenant in charge of all environmental and health and safety issues surrounding the base, visited to carry out an independent health and safety assessment on the team's working conditions.

**What they saw caused them to take action.**

"They said that it wasn't good. All our wet gear was always stored in the Tea Shed which was against health and safety regulations and we had no facilities for drying so we'd come in absolutely soaked and have other clothes dripping down on us and the stone floor."

Having looked at the situation and agreed that something would have to be done about it the Navy revealed that funds were available and that the club should make a bid for the money.

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They explained what we wanted to do and the Navy revealed that funds were available and that the club should make a bid for the money. Initially, the Navy rejected the plans because the plans didn't fit into the proposed budget so we did more work but were rejected again and it was only on the third attempt that we got approval - third time lucky," said Nick, who added that it took two and a half years to finally secure the funding.

The key to the success was approaching the civilian builders, VJ Fleet and Sons who had built several of the stone built bridges on the course and who had been contracted to undertake the work, and ask what they could do for the money available - £144,000 from the Navy and £50,000 raised by the club itself, as in addition to being Southwick Park Naval Recreation Centre it is also Southwick Park Golf Club with civilian members.

"We already knew what we wanted - a mess room, drying room, office, workshop, storeroom and the main storage space and this is what we came up with," said Nick, adding that he'd be more than happy to talk with other greenkeepers who were looking at new facilities.

Prior to going ahead they did visit other clubs with new facilities and once they were happy with the final plans ground work began last June with the team moving in on November 1.

"We carried out the move ourselves and with the course being closed for a couple of months due to the floodings we were able to concentrate on making it happen. We had a skip down at the Boat House and were ruthless..."
about throwing things out - nuts and bolts, old tractor weights and wheels all went," he recalled.

The course itself is exceptionally busy with 40-50,000 rounds a year on a lay-out which only stretches to 100 acres.

"Not so long ago it used to be a mind boggling 70,000 rounds a year so you can imagine how busy it was then. When a ship comes into port we often get a party coming up for a game, although many of those who play are not regular golfers," said Nick, who arrived at the course in April '96.

Prior to his arrival a policy of replacing the existing push-up greens with sand based had been in place but Nick decided to spend more time on the existing greens instead.

"We had no aeration equipment when I arrived so we got hold of some and started scarifying and rapid coring, putting an aeration programme in place. The majority of the course is on clay which doesn't help and when they attempted to stop the flooding in Fareham they backed the water up to us, so we caught the brunt of it," explained Nick, whose contract states that he must attend BIGGA Golf Days and lectures.

One interesting feature of the course is the fine bridge which spans the lake at one of its narrowest points - it was previously the disabled ramp at HMS Victory which is permanently berthed at Portsmouth.

The course does see its fair share of celebrities with the Royal Navy's most famous golfer, the Duke of York, playing a few rounds while he was stationed at HMS Dryad for a time.

HMS Dryad has a unique place in the country's history having been where Churchill, Eisenhower and Montgomery planned the D Day Landings and the three men used to adjourn to the village pub for a light refreshment after a long day's work.

"We've also had the Jim Davidson British Forces Foundation Day here with a whole lot of stars," said Nick, who, together with the team, has recently built some excellent new tees on the course.

The Course Management Centre is a fine example of what modern day maintenance facilities should be and Southwick Park Naval Recreation Centre has shown what can be done with a sensible budget. And those responsible have every right to look on with the same pride as the Royal Navy would of a newly commissioned aircraft carrier.
Jeremy Pilcher, Course Manager at Copt Heath Golf Club in Solihull, describes the background and work that went into producing their superb new greenkeeping facility...

Top of the Copts

Copt Heath Golf Club was formed in 1907, with the great Harry Vardon invited to contribute towards the laying out of the 18-hole course. In 1912 Harry Colt, the prominent golf course architect, made an inspection of the course and advised on what could be done to develop the existing layout. Over the next 20 years he would return to Copt Heath on several occasions to upgrade and improve on the layout.

Following the war, during which land was used for farming purposes, the firm of F G Hawtree and Son was given the job of reconstructing the course. In 1934 an opportunity to purchase Longdon Hall and its farm with 91 acres arose, this land adjoined the golf course and a decision was made to proceed with the purchase. Sometime in the mid 60's a milking parlour that had served the farm was converted to be used for greenkeeping use.

Over the next 35 years or so this building remained little changed, and during that time bound the greenkeepers and their machinery in increasing discomfort.

During 1998 two things happened, one was the club decided that new greenkeeping facilities were overdue and the second was a new Course Manager was appointed.

The latter half of 1998 an architect was appointed to design with the help and input of the greenstaff a completely new greenkeeping building that would meet our requirements for many years to come.

The siting of new buildings can often be a difficult decision, in our case we were already well situated with our present building as it sits almost in the middle of the course.

As things turned out our new building was actually erected just two metres from the end of the existing building.

The initial drawings produced by the architect were based upon what we thought would be the most practical use of space and movement in and out of the building.

This resulted in a building approximately 30m x 30m in total with a block constructed of brick attached to one end which would house such things as a office, mess room and shower/drying room.

The main building would be constructed of brick and cladding over a steel frame. From our point of view this would be a very practical building and would easily house our machinery plus allow some expansion room for additional machinery. It would also allow space for a fully equipped workshop and stores room.

Looking back we may have been a bit naive to think that the local planning office would allow such a building on what is greenbelt land and within the vicinity of Longdon Hall which by this time had acquired a Grade 2 listing.

However, the plan was submitted in December 1998, the planning office advised the architect that if the plans were to come before the planning meeting in January they would be turned down.

The club withdrew this application thereby saving the application fee which exceeded £2,000. Following extensive talks between the architect the club and planning officials guidelines were drawn up as to what the council would allow in terms of size of the building, the materials and the design of the building.

What planning officers had in mind was very far removed from our original ideas, they wanted to see something that when finished would resemble a group of farm buildings or stables, that in many ways would resemble the nearby farms and out-buildings attached to Longdon Hall.

The materials specified were to include such things a mixture of slate and tiles for the roofing and the bulk of the building to be constructed of brick that would closely match the brick of Longdon Hall.

As all this was going on we were still working out of the old milking parlour and preparing the course for such
things as The Peter McEvoy Trophy and holding the Regional Qualifying Round for The Open Championship. In the summer of 1999 Jim Tomkins, the architect, came back to us with his interpretation of the planners guidelines. The transformation was stunning! We now had before us a design for our golf buildings, located around a courtyard, just as you might find on a farm or at a stable. Because of the design, some space had been lost, but after careful consideration we came to the conclusion that the overall design and the much improved prospects of obtaining planning permission made it all worthwhile.

At this stage I would like to point out that at no time did the golf club put restrictions on our relationship with the architect, he always approached the greenstaff with any design and drawing which were then left with us to consider, and if needed we then added our suggestions which would then be incorporated into the design.

After lengthy consideration and consultation with the planning officer the golf club agreed to submit the much prized planning permission. The golf club took the decision to recommend that the club proceed with the contract and agree with the main contractor a price and possible dates for starting the work.

To ensure that the members of Copt Heath were kept informed of developments we arranged to hold two open evenings in the committee room where, we made available full colour drawings of the buildings and in attendance was members of the committee and myself as well as the architect.

Contracts were signed on May 18, 2000. A start was made on June 19, 2000. The summer of 2000 will be remembered as a wet and dull summer, although it did not cause many problems to the contractor some unforeseen difficulties did arise early on in construction, with unstable ground conditions being encountered during the excavation of the foundations. This involved the importation of around 440 tonnes of stone in one day alone. Site meetings were held every month so that any problems or queries could be discussed prior to the start of these meetings which were attended by the chairman of the buildings and developments committee for the golf club, along with the architect and myself, the contract was included by his site manager and project director.

Thankfully the golf club readily accepted the need to change various things as the project was developing, for example it soon became apparent that the three tonne capacity lift due to be installed in the workshop was not going to accept our fairway mower, a Toro 6700 due to the width of the units.

Consequently we upgraded this to four tones, giving not only a greater lift capacity, but also the required width to drive the machine onto the lift. Another change that became apparent was the need to upgrade the heating system in the staff block, originally the specification called for a number of wall mounted electric heaters placed in the office, newsroom/kitchen and drying room. I had always opposed these, favouring instead a oil fired central heating system, gas was never an option as we are some distance from the nearest gas supply. The contractor supplied cost comparisons between the two heating systems, obviously the oil fired boiler system was more expensive to install but over a longer term would result in lower fuel bills.

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Looking back the planning officials actually did us a favour in respect of rejecting the first design, as we now have a building that looks far better than we could ever have imagined, and with the use of materials probably far more in keeping with our surroundings and probably far more durable in the long term. One incident that could have being far more serious occurred one week-end, two youths obtained the key to a rough terrain fork lift truck. After breaking their way out of the compound, they decided on a quick tour of the golf course via several greens.

After being spotted by a member who then went in search of the abandoned vehicle, only to be apprehended by another member whose house overlooks the course.

The club after due consideration decided not to press charges, a decision also taken by the contractor.

These incidents did in no way hamper construction and as the end of October approached the building was nearing completions.

With the arrival of Autumn most of you will remember that signalled the start of the wettest autumn on record, this affected the final stages of construction to the extent that the underground petrol and diesel tanks due to be installed have had to be temporarily postponed.

Also a new access road that had been partially constructed had to be postponed. As I write this in February, these and the landscaping of the grounds still await completion.

Putting those aside, we have now a superb building which houses all the equipment and staff in very comfortable and secure premises.

For the time being the wet and dull summer have ended, although it did not cause many problems to the contractor some unforeseen difficulties did arise early on in construction, with unstable ground conditions being encountered during the excavation of the foundations.

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