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.
"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 old, rusty and small. We used to keep the greens mower, two John Dieses; a Toro, a Hayter a Hux Truck 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 next day 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 there and in the winter and heaven knows how many heaters we got through."

"The Boat House was exactly what the name suggests as it is located on the edge of the attractive lake which runs through the middle of the course.

"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 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," explained Nick.

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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.

"We explained what we wanted to do - 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.

Before 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 - 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.

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Equipment Inventory

**Tractor Units**
- Hayter L324
- 2 John Deere 2653As
- Toro 218 D
- John Deere 455
- Huxley Greenstar
- Huxley Huxtruck

**Attachments**
- Bobcat Shredder/Chipper
- Charterhouse Rapid core
- Huxley Toppresser
- Hand Sprayer
- Allman Sprayer
- Wessex Brickbow
- Wessex Trailer
- Wessex Blower
- Two Tone Trailer
- Lewis Lindfugger 33
- John Deere Brush
- John Deere Blade
- LF3800
- Silva Fairway Slitter
- Huxley Scarifier
- Rotary Deck
- Huxley Back Box

**Hand Machinery**
- 4 Supercertes
- 2 Stihl Blowers
- Stihl Chainsaw
- Husqvarna Chainsaw
- Robin Digger
- Allen Stimmer
- Stihl Stimmer
- Allen Flymo
- Push Leafblower
- Jetstar Blower
- Hedge Cutter

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

Head Greenkeeper Nick Beadle (right) and Simon Berry inspect the course.

Right: The old maintenance facilities were badly in need of renovation, which resulted in a brand new complex (far right).

Below: A purpose built wet room provides the team with facilities to change and dry work gear in comfort.
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 layout 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 coreing, 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, recently built some excellent new tees on the course.

The Course Management Centre is a fine example of 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.