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Big brother Roger said: “You didn’t want to come into greenkeeping in the 1970s. The pay was very poor, there was no education. If you could drive a tractor you were in, that was it.”

He joined in 1978, and confessed he faced a real challenge. With little money, an ageing greenkeeping team and needing wet greens dominated by meadowgrass, the club had temporary greens from 1 November all the way through until a fortnight before Easter. John joined as Deputy in 1980.

Roger continued: “The greens were so boggy even in summer. You would hit a shot onto the 17th green and it would plug in the turf! You had 95% meadowgrass greens with two inches of thatch. The club wouldn’t invest. It had a very good name in the forties, but it was bring in the past and it wasn’t anywhere near the standard anyone wanted – the club, golfers or the greenkeepers. There was no structure, no long-term plan.”

One of their first moves was to invite Jim Arthur to the course. With no formal education available, they avidly read his books and articles and knew they had to invite him to Wales – but the club needed convincing his visit was necessary.

Roger said: “The club were concerned that the knowledge Jim was bringing to the team would lead to them demanding higher wages. That was the mentality then. Eventually he came and it was a real eye opener, exactly as we’d read in his articles. He gave us all sorts of advice and pointers.”

John added: “Of course, at that time we didn’t have vertidrainers or slitters, so it was a case of hard forking the greens. We gradually got them firmer, so you could play the running game.”

“We gradually made progress, managing drier and drier surfaces. In drought conditions in the late eighties we decided to let the course ‘burn out’ for its long-term benefit. Maybe we went over the top occasionally but we were still learning. Sometimes you have to stoop to conquer.”

Gradually, golfers started to return with low handicappers enjoying this truly natural links test of golf all year round. In turn, this attracted tournaments. During my visit, the PGA Welsh National Championship was in town, and they’re also regularly hosted the Ladies European Tour and the R&A-backed Jacques Leglise Trophy between GB & Ireland’s boys’ team and their European counterparts. This year won by GB & Ireland. Naturally, this increased their focus and acclaim did present its own challenges.

Roger explained: “We realised a few years ago that the practice ground was too soft. Better players with more modern equipment were clearling the ground and landing balls on the 17th fairway. So we moved the 17th fairway further left, making it a tougher hole and extending the practice ground. For the same reason we’ve also moved some of the tee back.”

The Kerrys and the whole team are proud to say the greens are now predominantly bent (with roughly) 33% fescue and 67% meadowgrass. Their attention programme varies – they used to do once a year but aerated three times last year alongside firm solid tining, with swarding in October. They overseeded around three times a year with two types of fescue.

Roger said: “If we’ve learned anything it’s to go a level further. Working with Rhyys for a few weeks I think he can take it on to another level.”

It’s pleasing to note the Kerrys have put so much dream. Considering the hardships they’ve been going through, the years, and that will continue to be the case with Rhyys.”

It’s pleasing to note the Kerry name is not disappearing – John’s son Llion is First Assistant Greenkeeper, ensuring a nice historical continuation. He confirmed that the Kerrys have had a harmonious partnership, with disagreements confined to sarcastic sibling bickering. Assistant Greenkeeper Emyr Price has been at Harlech for 11 years and is very supportive through the years, if we wanted but it’s decided. After a few years they’ve decided to go.

Roger replied: “We are but it’s time to go. The club told us we could carry on if we wanted. We’ve had a few years of their long-term practices. So, why Harlech?”

Agronomically, to inherit a place like this which the Kerrys have put so much work into is probably every greenkeeper’s dream. Considering the hardships they’ve gone through over the years the course is phenomenal. I can’t think of many courses that have managed to change from meadowgrass to the fescue grass they have now.”

It placed in a Junior Open here when I was about 13 and played in many national championships over the years, so I’ve been aware of this special links for a long time. They hold plenty of tournaments here, and having worked on BRGGA’s Open Support Team a couple of times I’ve realised that’s what I enjoy the most – preparing the course for a championship and seeing what the elite golfers make of it. The feedback from the golfers is so valuable – and that shapes your thinking ahead of the next tournament.

It’s very much up to me to keep the same sort of tried and tested methods John and Roger have developed while taking it up a little notch or two. It’s not about starting from scratch, it’s building gradually from the excellent work Roger and his team have undertaken. You never stop learning in greenkeeping and that will be true here for me. It really has been a great honour to work alongside two real gentlemen of the greenkeeping industry.”

Roger’s final idea was to construct a walkway from the second green to the third tee. It was previously very narrow so it’s been improved – something that’s gone down well with the members.

He added that Castle Stuart is his vision of the ideal modern links – something which is backed by Roger and John. He intends to tweak the greens so they have a very rugged, natural appearance – and a big project looking to remove trees from the sand dunes to recreate an open, ‘linksy’ feel.

For more, visit the new greenkeeping blog set up by Rhyys: https://royalstdalldigfrofbolce.com.blogspot.co.uk

**ROYAL ST DAVID’S**
Even on a wet and wind swept autumnal morning, the setting for Royal St David’s Golf Club in Harlech, north west Wales, was breathtaking. It’s a remarkable location – an SSSI within Snowdonia National Park. Harlech Castle loomed high above while Snowdonia itself glowered imposingly from the north.

Roger Kerry has been Head Greenkeeper at the links for over 30 years, and his twin brother John has been Deputy for almost as long. My visit meant I would be able to examine the club’s past, present and future because they had already hired Roger’s replacement to join the team - Rhys Butler, former Deputy Head Greenkeeper at Aberdovey, a similar links 40 miles along the Welsh coast.

As I negotiated the small level crossing which runs yards from the club’s maintenance facility, I was immediately warmed by the twins, who revealed they would retire on different days! John had been 9pm on a November evening back in 1948, but Roger delayed his arrival until 3am, also because they had already hired Roger’s replacement to join the team - Rhys Butler, former Deputy Head Greenkeeper at Aberdovey, a similar links 40 miles along the Welsh coast.

Big brother Roger said: “You didn’t want to come into greenkeeping in the 1970s. The pay was very poor, there was no education. You could drive a tractor you were in, that was it.”

He joined in 1978, and confessed he faced a real challenge. With little money, an aging greenkeeping team and seeding wet grasses dominated by meadowgrass, the club had temporary greens from 1 November all the way through until a fortnight before Easter. John joined as Deputy in 1980.

Roger continued: “The greens were so boggy even in summer. You would hit a shot onto the 17th green and it would plug in the turf! You had 95% meadowgrass greens with two inches of thatch. The club wouldn’t invest. It had a very good name in the forties, but it was bring in the past and it wasn’t anywhere near the standard anyone wanted – the club, golfers or the greenkeepers. There was no structure, no long-term plan.”

One of their first moves was to invite Jim Arthur to the course. With no formal education available, they avidly read his books and articles and knew they had to invite him to Wales – but the club needed convincing his visit was necessary.

Roger said: “The club were concerned that the knowledge Jim would pass on to the team would lead to them demanding higher wages. That was the mentality then. Eventually he came and it was a real eye opener, exactly as we’d read in his articles. He gave us all sorts of advice and pointers.”

John added: “Of course, at that time we didn’t have vertidrainers or slotters, so it was a case of hand forking the greens. We gradually got them firmer, so you could play the running game.

“We gradually made progress, matting down and drier surfaces. In drought conditions in the late eighties we decided to let the course turn out for its long-term benefit. Maybe we went over the top occasionally but we were still learning. Sometimes you have to stoop to conquer.”

Gradually, golfers started to return with low handicappers enjoying this truly natural links test of golf all year round. In turn, this attracted tournaments. During my visit, the PGA Welsh National Championship was in town, and they’ve also regularly hosted the Ladies European Tour and the R&A-backed Jacques Leglise Trophy between GB & Ireland’s boys’ team and their European counterparts (this year won by GB & Ireland). Naturally, this increased focus and acclaim did present its own challenges.

Roger explained: “We realised a few years ago that the practice ground was too small. Better players with more modern equipment were clearing the ground and landing balls on the 17th fairway. So we moved the 17th fairway further left, making it a tougher hole and extending the practice ground. For the same reason we’ve also moved some of the tees back.”

The Kerrys – and the whole team – are proud to say the greens are now predominantly bent with (roughly) 35% fescue and 5% meadowgrass. Their attention programme varies – they used to do once a year but aerated three times last year alongside rotary lawn mowing, with sowing in October. They overseed around three times a year with two types of fescue.

Roger said: “If we’ve taken it to a good level, and continue working with Rhys for a few weeks I think he can take it on to another level.”

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He’s pleased to note the Kerry name is not disappearing – John’s son Ulan is First Assistant Greenkeeper, ensuring a nice historical continuation. He confirmed that the Kerrys have had a harmonious partnership, with any disagreements confined to sarcastic digs! Also, Assistant Greenkeeper Emry Price has been at the club for five years. John and Roger so he’s now entering his fortieth year at Harlech.

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“This is now up to me to keep in the same sort of tried and tested methods. John and Roger have developed whilst taking it up a little notch again. It’s not about starting from scratch, it’s building gradually from the excellent work Roger and his team have undertaken. You never stop learning in greenkeeping and that will be true here for me. It really has been a great honour to work alongside two real gentlemen of the greenkeeping industry.”

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For more, visit the Royal St David’s Golf Club on Facebook and follow @royalstdaviddists on Twitter.