A Day in the Life

Six months after his first greenkeeping crash course in Cheshire, Steve Castle joined the team at Immingham Golf Club the day before a major event with hundreds due to attend. What could possibly go wrong?

Back in November I experienced my first proper day in the life of a greenkeeper at Lymm Golf Club which featured digging drainage trenches in torrential rain – so I was extremely pleased to see the sun shining brightly as I headed for Immingham Golf Club, near Grimsby in Lincolnshire.

The club's four greenkeepers – Steve Beverly, Robin Portess, Rob Bemment and Malcolm Holden – arrived well before I turned up at 7am to continue preparations for the next day's Charity Golf Day, with 130 people expected to play.

My first impression was that the parkland course – which opened in 1975 as a nine-hole venue before being extended to 18 holes in 1985 - genuinely looked superb, taking on a vibrant green hue in the sunshine.

However, I quickly discovered there was still much hard work to complete behind the scenes to fine-tune the course ahead of one of its most important days of the season.

Head Greenkeeper Steve said: "It's vital to have the course looking its absolute best. As well as the money that will be brought in tomorrow, we want to convince some of the players to return and ultimately to become members. It's all about word of mouth, if they tell people they've enjoyed it and it's a first-class course more and more people will come and play here."

It would be no exaggeration to say the club exists on a shoestring budget, and have had to deal with problems ranging from disastrous floods to vandalism. It's been a challenging time for Scouser Steve who joined the club from Cleethorpes Golf Club (where he was Deputy Head Greenkeeper) in 2006.

"In June 2007 this area suffered horrendous flooding. We had 331mm of rain that month, to put that in context the next highest since I arrived was 154mm in June last year. Part of the course is below sea level and that flooded very badly, and it's clay-based so the water had nowhere to go. Everyone described it as a once-in-a-lifetime month, I just hope they're right!"

My first task was to help Steve empty the bins and ball washers next to the tees, and we began just yards from the impressive club house.

As we worked our way around the course he showed me how to trim the holes – exactly the sort of task I did not appreciate as a casual golfer before I joined BIGGA but am now well aware of. It was clear attention to detail was absolutely vital as the club sought to convince many of the next day's punters to return.

"Machines are expensive to buy new so generally we all muck in and repair them when something breaks" Steve confided that the team had to take a pay cut at the height of the club's financial problems in 2010, and the newest machine the club owns is a five-year-old Toro Groundsmaster 7210. He added: "You have to balance out the cost of continually repairing against the cost of new machinery. These machines are expensive to buy new so generally we all muck in and repair them when something breaks."

After lunch in the shipping container which doubles as a mess room, Steve risked letting me loose...
A day in the life

Six months after his first greenkeeping crash course in Cheshire, Steve Castle joined the team at Immingham Golf Club the day before a major event with hundreds due to attend. What could possibly go wrong?

Back in November I experienced my first proper day in the life of a greenkeeper at Lymm Golf Club which featured digging drainage trenches in torrential rain – so I was extremely pleased to see the sun shining brightly as I headed for Immingham Golf Club, near Grimsby in Lincolnshire.

The club’s four greenkeepers – Steve Beverly, Robin Portess, Rob Bemment and Malcolm Holden – arrived well before I turned up at 7am to continue preparations for the next day’s Charity Golf Day, with 130 people expected to play.

My first impression was that the parkland course – which opened in 1975 as a nine-hole venue before being extended to 18 holes in 1985 – genuinely looked superb, taking on a vibrant green hue in the sunshine. However, I quickly discovered there was still much hard work to complete behind the scenes to fine-tune the course ahead of one of its most important days of the season.

Head Greenkeeper Steve said: “It’s vital to have the course looking its absolute best. As well as the money that will be brought in tomorrow, we want to convince some of the players to return and ultimately to become members. It’s all about word of mouth, if they tell people they’ve enjoyed it and it’s a first-class course more and more people will come and play here.”

It would be no exaggeration to say the club exists on a shoestring budget, and have had to deal with problems ranging from disastrous floods to vandalism. It’s been a challenging time for Scouser Steve who joined the club from Cleethorpes Golf Club (where he was Deputy Head Greenkeeper) in 2006.

“As we worked our way around the course he showed me how to trim the holes – exactly the sort of task I did not appreciate as a casual golfer before I joined BIGGA but am now well aware of. It was clear attention to detail was absolutely vital as the club sought to convince many of the next day’s punters to return.”

Steve confirmed that the team had to take a pay cut at the height of the club’s financial problems in 2010, and the newest machine the club owns is a five-year-old Toro Groundsmaster 7210. He added: “You have to balance out the cost of continually repairing against the cost of new machinery. These machines are expensive to buy new so generally we all muck in and repair them when something breaks.”

As we worked our way around the course he showed me how to trim the holes – exactly the sort of task I did not appreciate as a casual golfer before I joined BIGGA but am now well aware of. It was clear attention to detail was absolutely vital as the club sought to convince many of the next day’s punters to return.”

This brought us on to the inevitably thorny issue of money in an area which is one of the least prosperous in the UK.

As well as the money that will be brought in tomorrow, we want to convince some of the players to return and ultimately to become members. It’s all about word of mouth, if they tell people they’ve enjoyed it and it’s a first-class course more and more people will come and play here.”

“Machines are expensive to buy new so generally we all muck in and repair them when something breaks”
on parts of the course. I attempted to mow the 18th green with a Ran- somes Jacobsen Greens King 6, but sadly failed to lift the mower up quickly enough and took a bite out of the side of the green – something I stupidly replicated later on a tee box. I’ve definitely still got some way to go in my greenskeeping education.

My favourite machine was the Toro Groundsmaster 7210. It’s controlled with an unusual (to me) pair of hand-held levers. This took a little bit of time to adjust to, but within a few minutes I was confidently driving it around and having more fun than was strictly necessary.

Later, Steve and I spent much of the day painstakingly raking the club’s 44 bunkers. He showed me the correct technique – and also showed me how to take the soil temperature, something he does every day – before he continued on the financial theme.

He said: “At BTME I heard a greenkeeper say he’d spent £7,000 every day – before he continued on the correct technique – and also that the club’s 44 bunkers. He showed me how to do it.”

A couple of members were very keen to praise the course despite the harsh economic realities. Comments included “it looks and plays fantastic”, “these lads are doing a great job” and “it’s the best course in the area”. I’ve been made well aware that BRGBGA members feel their tireless work is sometimes unappreciated by many golfers at their clubs, so it was refreshing to hear this positivity. The only complaint I heard was that Immingham – with its tough par threes and fours, some blind tee shots and undulating fairways – was too hard!

Steve says: “It is a tough course and probably doesn’t get the credit it deserves. Like any course you take care with your course manage- ment – and bit it down the middle – you won’t end up in trouble!”

I then noticed that a window on the second floor of the clubhouse was being repaired. I feared another sad tale of mindless vandalism until Robin started laughing, and tried to explain how one visiting golfer had managed to whack a ball through it while practising in a net far below. He said: “He must have accident- ally hit it back off the iron frame, it’s sailed just past his head, shot 20 feet up and gone through the window. It was like CSI Imming- ham the next day with us all trying to work out how he’d done it.”

All in all, a hugely enjoyable and informative day and I left knowing I’d discovered a hidden gem of a club.

We’re proving here that you don’t need a massive budget to create a great course. The team have a genuine affection for the club and each other. At 3pm, you might have expected them to have sprinted off home after another tough day, but in fact the opposite was true. Robin quickly got some practice in on the putting green (the whole team are very keen golfers with low handicaps) and we then headed for a well earned drink in the clubhouse.

Steve says: “We have two ‘maintenance weeks’ when aeration and heavier top dressing is carried out, with routine aerination regularly carried out throughout the year. The greens maintain slightly higher levels of thatch than would ideally like, as a mixture of hollow coring, sand lifting and verti-draining is carried out. The greens are sifted through at 3-4 week intervals depending on the golf calendar using a mixture of from and 14mm times at varying depths. They are fed using granular fertilisers from spring to autumn and liquids in winter. We use lawn seed in the spring, 3-0-9 in summer and 3-0-22 in the autumn. We’re trialling two different types of bio-stimulants which comprise sugars and seaweeds amongst other elements. “We’ve reduced fairway verti-draining due to the high cost of fuel, and fairway scarification is required but unfortunately is not financially viable.”

AERATION PROGRAMME

“Greens treated with Qualibra were clearly healthier and provided better playing surfaces.”

Ian Coote
Royston Golf Club, Herts

“From what I have seen, using Qualibra would mean I may only need to irrigate once a week – a big saving in time and money.”

Glenn Rayfield
Felstedwre Ferry Golf Club, Suffolk

“Where we had sprayed Qualibra there has been a marked and sustained improvement in sward quality.”

Philip Baldock
Ganton Golf Club, Yorkshire

New wetting and water conservation technology that moves water from the surface AND holds it deeper and more evenly in the root zone.

Visit www.greencast.co.uk for more information
We’re proving here that you don’t need a massive budget to create a great course.

The team have a genuine affection for the club and each other. At 3pm, you might have expected them to have sprinted off home after another tough day, but in fact the opposite was true. Robin quickly got some practice in on the putting green (the whole team are very keen golfers with low handicaps) and we then headed for a well earned drink in the clubhouse.

A couple of members were very keen to praise the course despite the harsh economic realities. Comments included “it looks and plays fantastic”, “these lads are doing a great job” and “it’s the best course in the area”. I’ve been made well aware that BIGGA members feel their tireless work is sometimes unappreciated by many golfers at their clubs, so it was refreshing to hear this positivity. The only complaint I heard was that Immingham – with its tough par threes and fours, some blind tee shots and undulating fairways – was too hard! Steve says: “It is a tough course and probably doesn’t get the credit it deserves. Like any course if you take care with your course management – and bit it down the middle – you won’t end up in trouble!”

I then noticed that a window on the second floor of the clubhouse was being repaired. I feared another sad tale of mindless vandalism until Robin started laughing, and tried to explain how one visiting golfer had managed to whack a ball through it whilst practising in a net far below. He said: “He must have accidentally hit it back off the iron frame, it’s sailed just past his head, shot 20 feet up and gone through the window. It was like CSI Immingham the next day with us all trying to work out how he’d done it.”

All in all, a hugely enjoyable and informative day and I left knowing I’d discovered a hidden gem of a club.

Experience NEW standards of performance...

“Greens treated with Qualibra were clearly healthier and provided better playing surfaces.”

Ian Coote
Rytonon Golf Club, Herts

“From what I have seen, using Qualibra would mean I may only need to irrigate once a week – a big saving in time and money.”

Glenn Rayfield
Felstedwe Ferry Golf Club, Suffolk

“Where we had sprayed Qualibra there has been a marked and sustained improvement in sward quality.”

Philip Baldock
Ganton Golf Club, Yorkshire