Temple Golf Club has many progressive ideas of management both on and off the golf course. Temple Golf Club sits high above the River Thames between Henley, Marlow and Maidenhead and when it comes to progressive management and consideration of conservation is also head and shoulders above most other golf clubs. Head Greenkeeper Martin Gunn and his Chairman of Green, Malcolm Peake, have produced a blueprint which should provide the continuity to ensure the club's continuing and sustained improvement. Among their work has been the introduction of a "natural" course management technique, a sustained commitment to conservation and the environment, the production of a regular newsletter, the division of responsibility among the greenkeeping team and reconstruction work on the course itself while they also provide input to the R&A Turf Advisory and Research Working party chaired by Nick Park.

Martin took over in '91 having been First Assistant before that while Malcolm, who owns a retail business in nearby Maidenhead and was asked to join the club's Board of Management with a view to being Chairman of Green.
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A report had been done by the STRI in 1987 but little action was taken on the strength of it and when another report was commissioned Jeff Perris of the STRI said things had got worst since the first report.

"I knew things weren't right," said Malcolm by way of explanation as to why he sought out a job most self respecting golf club member wouldn't touch with a bunker rake.

"I've learned a lot since then and the Board invited me to serve a second term," he explained.

"The issues that Malcolm was shouting about gave me the carrot which I needed to grab. He was right in his concerns about the golf course but didn't know why, and I knew we could work together to improve things," said Martin.

Temple Golf Club had always been well presented but there had been very little hollow tining or aeration done on the course.

"We were well aware that the course would have to become a lot worst before it got better while at the same time it would require more investment," said Martin.

The new team would therefore be in the uncomfortable position of having a course not looking good but costing more money to get it to that state. Questions were asked.

"I use a very natural management technique with no overseeding and the greens have become stronger and stronger with bents coming back up to about 60%," explained Martin.

"The initial response was so negative it was unbelievable - 'this is not a nature park, it's a golf course' - but once they started to see species like orchids increase in number the same people who had been complaining at the beginning were ringing me up in the evening and saying that they had seen people walking about where the orchids were."

They are involved with conservation groups including the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Naturalist Trust and the Windsor and Maidenhead Urban Wildlife Group which produced
A Temple to excellence

a comprehensive report of the course in 1992 while they are also involved with David Stubbs and his European Ecology Unit.

“We have a tree, well out of the way of play, which is dead but has some wonderful fungi growing on it and woodpecker holes. There is absolutely no reason to cut it down and to me is a good example of golf and conservation working together. I’ve taken a group of 30 students from Hungary round the course. The conservation work has helped us to receive numerous grants over the years.”

Martin also encourages students to visit the course to experience a working golf club and learn from the management techniques he employs.

He and Malcolm also produce a regular report for the members which keeps everyone informed as to work on the golf course as well as giving more general information about greenkeeping matters.

“The idea is to improve communication because if members know when something is being done and why, they are more likely to accept it,” said Malcolm.

The pair work extremely well together and make a point of visiting other golf clubs every three or four months just to talk to the Head Greenkeeper or Course Manager and find out how they see things and how they manage elements of their job.

“We’ve had a day at Woodhall Spa, a day at Sunningdale and, of course, Lindrick while at Royal County Down I organised a short visit to their Head Greenkeeper who was a marvellous man,” said Malcolm.

“Nick Park also fixed me up with a day at Valderamma while I was in Spain. I had the opportunity to play but frankly it was too interesting and I used up two rolls of film just taking in how they operate there. You can learn from every course you visit.”

Another scheme which Martin employs at Temple involves each of his five man team are trained and have designated area of responsibility on the course over and above their normal duties.

Deputy Head Greenkeeper

‘Improving communication: If members know when something is being done and why, they are more likely to accept it’

Gareth Austin is responsible for Woodlands, Boundaries and Amenity Horticulture; First Assistant Ian Hewitt for Equipment Repairs, Servicing and Maintenance, Data Recording and Spares; Assistant Russell Clark Irrigation, Installation, Repairs, Servicing and Maintenance; Assistant Saunders yet to be confirmed but possibly First Aid, Health and Safety while Trainee Tony Taylor is already interested in Engine Maintenance.

Having developed the staff and course management structures Martin and Malcolm turned their attention to the layout of the course itself.

“Raymond Oppenheimer

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excellence

never allowed any change at
Temple without prior consulta-
tion with a golf course architect
among them Henry Cotton, a
former professional of Temple
GC, Frank Fennick and Donald
Steel. It was only natural for us
to contact Donald when we had
reached this stage of our de-
velopment.
I rang him not just to talk
about architecture but also
because he has been Chairman
of Green at Denham for many
years,” explained Malcolm.
“He came and asked what we
wanted to do and we said that
we wanted him to review the
course generally. We decided to
walk round the course and he
would ask us on the tee what
we thought and he would
either agree or not as the case
may be.
“Then he did us a report hole-
by-hole which is now our long
term plan of what we want to
achieve.
“More I talked to Donald
the more I came to realise that
we had some superb short par
fours. We wanted to extend
the course where possible, but not
if it might be to the detriment
of a hole.
Much of the work involved
changing the shapes of the
greens or, more accurately,
returning them to how Willie
Park Jnr had designed them in
the first place.
“We are trying to return to
Willie Park Jnr’s design, and
particularly the bunkering, and
that is where Donald helped us,”
said Martin.
“It’s quite exciting as we are
getting quite close to it now.
Reshaping the greens have
given us an immense variety of
new pin placements which
some of our members haven’t
even seen yet,” added Malcolm.
I’m getting comments from
members that they are now
able to play chip and run shots
and going back to playing shots
they haven’t done for many
years. It is much more exciting.”

All the construction work has
been carried out in-house and
at every phase, in fact, for all
the significant work carried out
on the course it is pho-
tographed and put in an album.
“This is very useful. We found
consider that many of these
people, in the form of commit-
tees, are responsible for the day
to day running of the nation’s
golf courses.
It is hardly surprising that a
lot of courses, many of them
high profile, are in a state of
decline,” said Malcolm.
Martin adds a cautionary
note to his colleagues not fortu-
nate enough to have the con-
tinuity he enjoys.
“I believe that a lot of Course
Managers and Head Green-
keepers are not going to survive
this period unless the problems
of continuity are solved. People
are setting objectives almost on
a year to year basis and you
can’t survive like that. You need
direction which stretches for a
period of time.”
Martin has nothing but praise
for his own Board of Manage-
ment which has backed him to
the hilt.
“I have seen a marked
increase in my budgets in
machinery and labour and we
now have a different set of
objectives. When I first took
over the objective was “To Maintain
the Golf Course” now it is “To
Maintain, Improve and Take
Forward the Golf Course” which
is a very different concept.”
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"That's a unanimous vote in favour I believe – I'll advise the Greenkeeper to go ahead"

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Roland Taylor takes a look at developments in grass cutting equipment.

The increasing popularity of golf over the last decade has brought with it many changes, especially in the way courses are now maintained. The higher the profile any sport receives, the greater the demand for improved facilities.

The UK golfer who watches televised matches from the USA now expects his home course to look as good the one his counterpart plays on across the pond. For the local club, the nett result is a demand for manicured fairways and neatly trimmed rough.

This metamorphosis has brought about a fast-moving development in grass cutting equipment. While Budding's computer-aided-design and control systems throughout very little, a technological revolution has taken place in the design of engines, drives and components. The grass machinery market is highly competitive and today's manufacturers have had to invest in computer-aided-design and control systems throughout.
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