

THE COUNTY of Surrey is endowed with a profusion of good golf courses and one that has always been a popular choice with golfers is Betchworth Park Golf Club on the outskirts of Dorking. Don Major, 57, head greenkeeper has been with the club for 21 years and his enthusiasm for golf and his course has never diminished during the long period I have known him. The fine condition of the course is a tribute to all the hard work and interest shown by himself and his staff over the years.

Talking about his career and his love for the game, Don Major said, "Having been in the Forces and enjoyed an outdoor life playing golf, cricket and football, it was difficult afterwards to settle down to a humdrum job with the Eagle Star Insurance Company and I always had a hankering to work on a golf course."

"Our local course, Flackwell Heath, was only a four iron shot from my home and the head greenkeeper there used to pass the door mornings and evenings, so it was not long before I persuaded him to give me a job, and from there my career in greenkeeping blossomed. I worked at the club for five years after which I married a bonnie local lass, Gillian, and we have a daughter who is married to one of my staff now at Betchworth Park.

"From there I went to work with Bob Plain, a genial Scot who was head greenkeeper then at Beaconsfield Golf Club and he steeped me in a lot of the tradition and greenkeeping skills which are essential to be a successful golf course manager. After serving seven years with Bob he decided that I had the necessary experience and competence to seek a position that would offer more scope and responsibility.

"After this I went to Camberley Heath for three years but things never materialised as I hoped. Finally it was through Frank Brittan of Parkers that I learned of the vacancy for head greenkeeper at Betchworth

Park - I applied and got the job and have remained here ever since.

"When I took over the course there was a lot of work to be done to reach the standards that I was aiming for. Over the years we have done a lot of construction work to improve the layout, tree planting, renovation and repair combined with a regular programme of turf management to keep the course in good playing condition.

"As an example we have recently had installed by Watermation a new irrigation system for all tees and upgraded the greens irrigation.



Don Major, headgreenkeeper at Betchworth for 21 years

"I must be one of the lucky ones with staff - my first assistant has been here 14 years, another man has 11 years service, and my son-in-law has clocked up five years with me. I also have a part-time employee, who works three or four days a week, who has been on the payroll a long time."

"The terrain at Betchworth is slightly undulating. It is not tiring to play golf here; there are one or two slight inclines at the 8th and 10th holes, then downhill to the 11th, after that the rest of the course is fairly flat. The greens have undulations and are deceptive to read but they putt reasonably well.

OUT ON THE COURSE

Betchworth Park

by

John Campbell

"We are fairly well equipped with two Toro GM 3's for the greens and have on standby four Auto-Certes mowers. A Ransomes 180 is used on the tees which we hope to replace with a Toro 216 Reelmaster. Trimming around the trees is done with a Toro 70 machine. A 27hp. four wheel drive Kubota tractor pulls the fairway gang units and a ten year old Ferguson tractor is used to cut the semi-rough together with a full Cushman System. In addition we have all the usual assortment of small equipment, like Strimmers, Flymos and Chainsaws.

"The staff are all encouraged to treat the machinery as though it were their own. For instance, if the GM 3 breaks down through incompetence it may mean resorting to the pedestrian mowers to cut the greens, which is not popular - so the incentive is look after the equipment properly or take the consequences. Respect for the machinery by careful handling and regular maintenance, saves the club unnecessary bills, keeps the machinery in good condition, adds to its working life and efficiency of operation and reduces down time.

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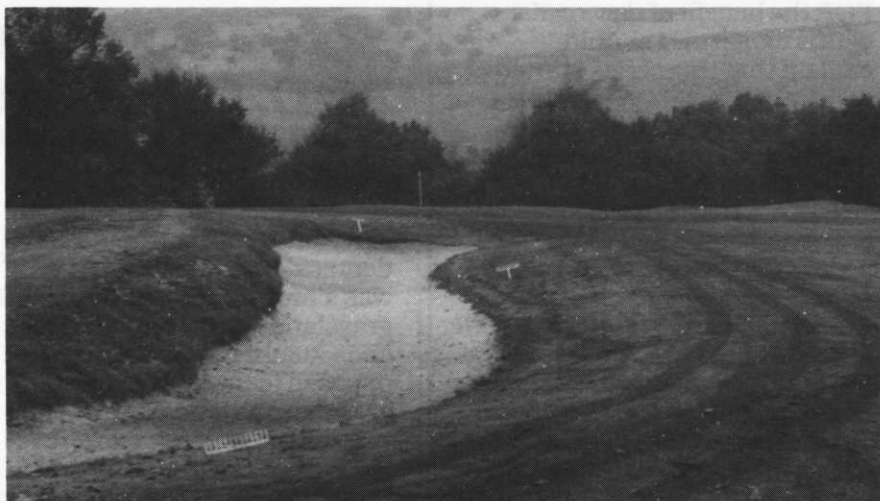
Don went on, "Like many tree lined courses around here we lost a lot of lovely old trees during the night of the hurricane force winds which devastated the south of England. Damage was quite extensive around the 2nd tee where 13 massive beeches came down. Around the ruins of the ancient Betchworth Castle at the 11th hole we lost a few lime and beech trees. Fortunately most of those blown over fell back into the wood behind so there was little damage to the course. Many of our trees were magnificent specimens which have taken a lifetime to grow. Their loss is a great blow.

"We have some lovely American oaks - two of these were brought down and the horse chestnuts took quite a bashing from the wind. Thankfully many of the majestic trees that enhance the golfing scene at Betchworth did survive that dreadful night but we are left licking our wounds and picking up the pieces. Hopefully we will never experience this again in our lifetime."

"Over the years we have systematically planted Scots pine, cypressus, lime, beech, silver birch and mountain ash to maintain a good variety of trees on the course. Some horse chestnuts planted a few years ago have not done so well, but we plan to replace them with may trees, probably white and pink, or white and red to add a welcome splash of colour in the middle of the course.

"Clumps of rhododendrons have been successfully transplanted to break up open spaces and they blend in well with other features on the course and create a satisfactory balance."

Don Major is a modest man, a



Betchworth has some large traps

very good golfer whose name is inscribed on many trophies. He has won the British Greenkeepers Tournament several times and been runner-up on occasions. His proudest moment recently was to win the Artisan Senior Handicap Championship at Moor Park and bring the honour back to his own artisan club at Betchworth. The trophy is displayed in the parent club.

"I was always a staunch supporter of the old BGGGA," said Don, "and have been involved with the administration of the association since 1962 when I was elected to the committee of the Southern Section. I served as an executive member for the south of England during which time my wife took over as secretary for a brief period."

"It's good to have all the greenkeeping associations now under the one banner of BIGGA with our own Executive Director, Neil Thomas at the helm. This deserves the full support of every greenkeeper and golf club in the country, but we must be patient and appreciate that it's going to take a little time to set up our new organisation - the future is bright and we have much to look forward to".

OUT ON THE COURSE



The clubhouse at Betchworth Park has a commanding view of the course