

OUT ON THE COURSE AT WELWYN GARDEN



THE course at Welwyn Garden City, founded in 1922, is a popular venue for Hertfordshire golfers. This well known club has a modest claim to fame - a former junior member, Nick Faldo, is the former Open Golf Champion.

The course manager, John Wells, 28, is a competent and practical man who possesses those ideal qualities of leadership and enthusiasm to inspire his industrious team of greenkeepers. John said, "I live in the Garden City with my wife Carol and young daughter Amy. I enjoy playing golf, 14 handicap, but my main sport is cricket and this year I captain our local cricket club. I was fond of football, although I've finished playing now after breaking my leg on two occasions!"

John said, "I left school at 16 not quite knowing what I wanted to do. It was purely by chance that I came into greenkeeping. When I was football training one evening a friend said there was a job going at Welwyn Garden City Golf Club - I applied and got the job. While there I attended educational classes at Oatlands Horticultural College. After a

spell I went to work at Dyrham Park as assistant head greenkeeper. Not long afterwards Welwyn Garden City had a vacancy for a course manager which I secured, and I have been here for over eight years now.

Young team

"I have a reasonably young team of five, including a part time handyman. Three of the staff are now at college taking City and Guilds, and the youngest member will be going next year. Peter Simmonds, our assistant course manager, has been in greenkeeping as long as I have - 11 years. He is a very experienced man, trustworthy and utterly reliable.

"We have a relatively compact parkland course laid out in less than 100 acres which needs frequent mowing to keep it in good shape. I like to keep the greens firm and resilient and prefer fast true putting surfaces that call for the right kind of shot to bite and hold rather than target golf greens.

John continued: "The course is on heavy soil and we do suffer a bit from compaction in confined areas like walkways

Above: Constructing the new putting green at Welwyn Garden City

and bottlenecks, so a lot of aeration needs to be done. For major tracts we use the Sisis DP 48 spiker for autumn and winter aeration on a regular basis when surface conditions permit. We have a brush for the fairways which is used three or four times a year. It helps to raise prostrate stems and allows the gangmowers to do a better job. This improves the quality of the turf and produces better lies for fairway shots.

"I like the Verti-Drain and find it invaluable for relieving compaction on our heavy soil, particularly on the greens, which are quite small. They are old established putting surfaces with very little drainage and need a lot of aeration to keep them permeable enough for rapid moisture penetration. Over the past few years we have lifted several greens and installed pipe drainage. This is part of a yearly improvement programme, whether it be to improve drainage, or re-siting to extend the yardage and adding to the playing strategy", explained John.

"Some tees are smaller than is desirable - the par 3's take quite a pounding. In the last few years we have enlarged many to present more space for all the wear and tear. In confined spots where tees have been extended we used sleeper walls as a means of revetment for the banks.

"Last winter was one of our busiest - we reconstructed the 11th green from scratch. Two tees were extended and three others were re-levelled. Two bunkers were added and two old ones filled in. All that was on top of a tree planting programme. I think most greenkeepers enjoy winter construction jobs: It's creative, the time goes quicker and it is a means of improving the course for the enjoyment of play.



John Wells, Welwyn's Head Greenkeeper

Major projects

"We have tackled major construction projects - about 18 months ago we completely rebuilt a new putting green in front of the clubhouse. Stripping off turf, top soil and re-levelling the subgrade, installing a drainage system with gravel carpet above, a binding layer of course sand, top soil replaced then turf relaid. The area around the green was landscaped with

flower beds and floodlighting to complete the job. This now provides an extremely attractive setting and amenity in front of the clubhouse, particularly when illuminated at night.

"We have invested substantially in the latest machinery to carry out the work economically and speedily," said John. "It gives the staff incentive to know they are all valued as employees. This is reflected in the

conscientious efforts of everybody to give of their best. I think it is important for every club to appreciate those who look after the golf course and we certainly get that support here.

"We are all members of BIGGA and are given time off to attend meetings, lectures and golf days held by the association. We belong to the Mid-Anglia Section, and I have served on the committee for several years and was recently appointed regional representative for the section. It is good to be involved at committee level and know you are making a worthwhile contribution to the affairs of the association."

John continued, "We are all proud to see the association being run professionally and I am optimistic for the future. I hope the membership appreciates just how much voluntary time and effort is made by the various committees to promote our organisation. The lead coming from the top is good. We have to act more professionally in all our affairs, take pride in our jobs, and raise our standards. This is bound to bring higher rewards."

Left: Top Soil laid on the putting green prior to laying turf. Note treading in the foreground before final raking.



Story by John Campbell