



Out on the course at Ayr Belleisle

THE Belleisle Golf Course, Ayr, is considered by many to be one of the finest public golf courses in Scotland. Although close to the coast, it is truly a parkland course. Belleisle was a qualifying course for the European Open in 1979, and staged the British Ladies Championships in 1979 and 1981.

In charge of the golf complex at Ayr Belleisle is Harry Diamond, 57, a highly respected man of long experience in greenkeeping. Harry said, "I started working on the golf course at Western Gailes in 1943, and from there I went to Glasgow Gailes for 11 years. During this period I did National Service in the Army in Malaya and the Far East. The Glasgow club was generous to me while I was absent and I remember receiving my usual Christmas bonus, which I accidentally dropped into a river in the Malayan jungle! However I managed to recover a soggy cheque for £5, which was most welcome.

"After my military service I



returned to Glasgow Gailes, then moved on to Irvine Golf Club as head greenkeeper at the age of 25. Ultimately, I came to look after the two courses, Belleisle and Seafield, in 1970 and have remained here ever since." Harry continued "I have three married daughters and a son, who has not followed me in greenkeeping. My wife is long suffering, like all greenkeepers' wives, I suppose. You try to give

Top: 8th green with the 6th on the right and 7th in background.

Above: The 12th, with the 18th in background.

by
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of your best in the job; often there is a lot demanded of you by way of long hours, which can put a strain on family life.

"The Belleisle course was designed by James Braid and opened in 1927. It has always been a popular and very busy course, averaging 60,000 rounds a year. It is quite unique, being a rolling parkland layout with lovely distant views of the sea. The main features are the well established variety of trees, which have been strategically planted to break up the landscape, and the number of bunkers on the course that come into play.

"The holes are all very testing - the aggregate length of the par fours on the course is 240 yards, longer than Augusta where the Masters is played! There are five short holes, four of which are 200 yards or more.

Although the greens are generous in size, averaging 800 sq. yds., it takes a good shot to find the putting surface and stay there."

POTENTIAL

Harry went on, "the Seafield course has all the potential of a links, constructed on sandy soil. It was built as a nine hole course within the perimeter of the old racecourse and opened



in 1904. We are trying to make it more interesting by using the natural elevated points to build tees with commanding views of the surroundings. Up till now it has been classed as a grade three course to accommodate the large number of young people who play golf in Ayrshire.

"Between the two courses, we hope with all the alterations being made on Seafield, that the one will complement the other and give players of all handicaps a really good day's golf.

"We have clays and a lot of

heavy soil to contend with and have installed a fairly extensive drainage system which has proved successful. A strict maintenance programme of cleaning all the drains annually helps to keep them free of tree roots, silt and so on.

"Another problem is the amount of play on the courses, which means careful planning of the work schedule to get all the necessary work done. In the summer, work begins at 6.30 am - if there is a special event it may be earlier. The staff usually have a short break in the middle of the day and work straight through. If important jobs need to be done we carry on

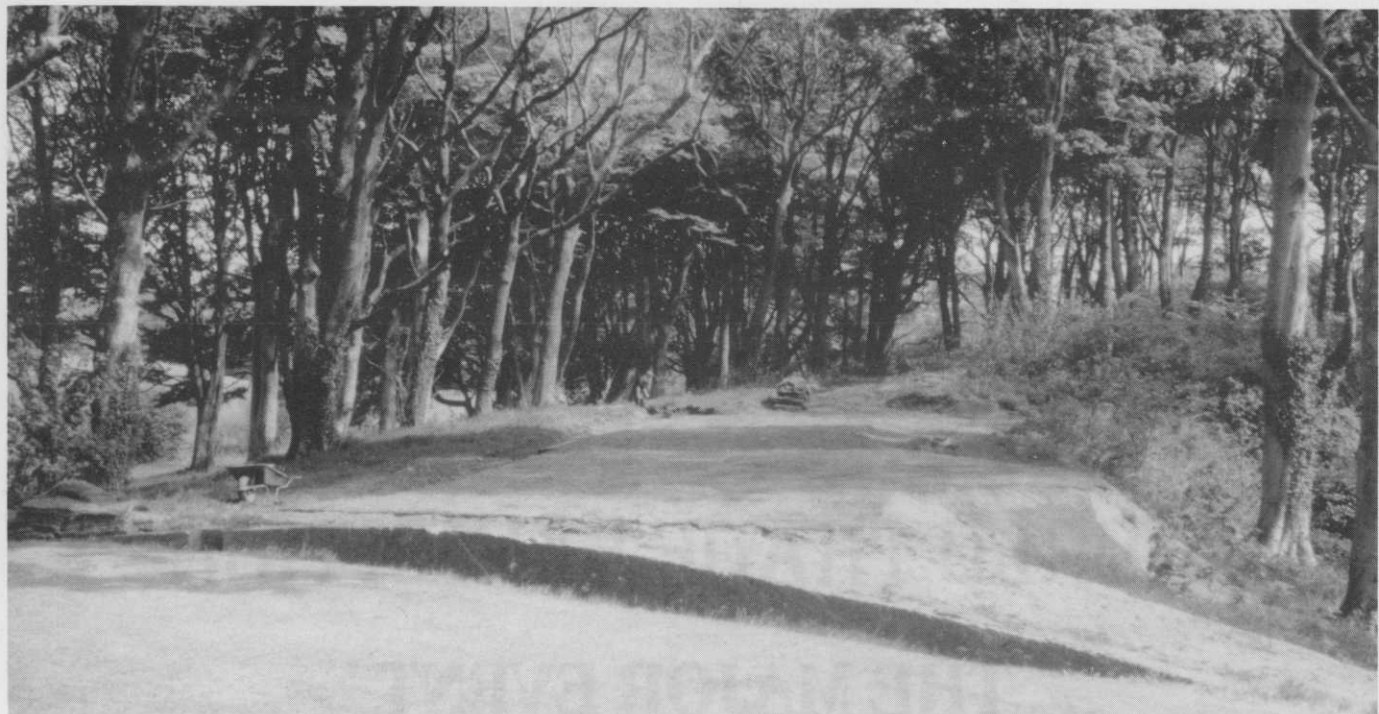
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"The Seafield has all the potential of a links course"

Above: 6th and 7th greens.

Left: Harry Diamond, John Campbell and Neil Thomas approach the 4th green.





Above: New 18th tee, Seafield.

until completion. The strength of our staff is six experienced men, plus two YTS lads." said Harry. "Since Duncan Gray came here as Parks Superintendent, responsible for eight golf courses and five bowling greens in the Kyle and Carrick region, we have been able to implement a fairly intensive training programme for all staff. I have four young men attending college and all our other courses have a similar number of staff coming into this education stream. We have appointed a foreman for each course, which is something new. Ian Campbell, who started his career at Turnberry, is in charge of the Belleisle course and Jim Devlin, who came to me five years ago as an electrical engineer looking for a job in greenkeeping, is now responsible for the Seafield course.

GOOD TRAINING

"The staff get good training and experience, as we do all our own construction, drainage, building new greens and tees. There is a training college in Ayr which is well attended. Three times a year all the students come to Belleisle and I

generally give them a three hour lecture on bunkers in the morning, then they do practical jobs on bunkers in the afternoon.

"You may wonder how it is possible to talk for three hours on bunkers - I could make it ten! I start by explaining how traps originated, how to construct them, and talk about the many different ways of revetting bunker faces." Harry explained, "Taking your place in a local authority and dealing with budget expenditure, getting new machinery etc, has been very trying for me. You don't always get what you would like to have. However, since Duncan Gray, our Parks Supervisor, arrived on the scene things have improved immeasurably. We recently took delivery of a new Jacobsen Triplex Greens mower and a Turf King. This means we have a full set of machinery for each course for the first time, so work can proceed speedily, efficiently and economically.

"We are now concentrating all our efforts to upgrade the Seafield course, which has for long been the poor relation. Lately we have carried out extensive work to improve the facilities, most of which has

been imaginative and designed to add pleasure and interest for all golfers."

ADVOCATE!

Continued Harry, "I have long been involved in the affairs of greenkeeping in Scotland at committee level and have always been an advocate for proper training and educational facilities for young aspirants coming into greenkeeping. I see BIGGA as the means of helping us to attain our objective of upgrading the status of the greenkeeper, and anything that does that will get my full support and undivided attention!

"We in Ayrshire look forward to hosting the BIGGA National Tournament and International Conference this month. It is an important occasion and one which will give us the opportunity to extend a warm Scottish welcome to all the delegates and their wives. We are planning an interesting programme of events to make their stay a memorable and enjoyable one."