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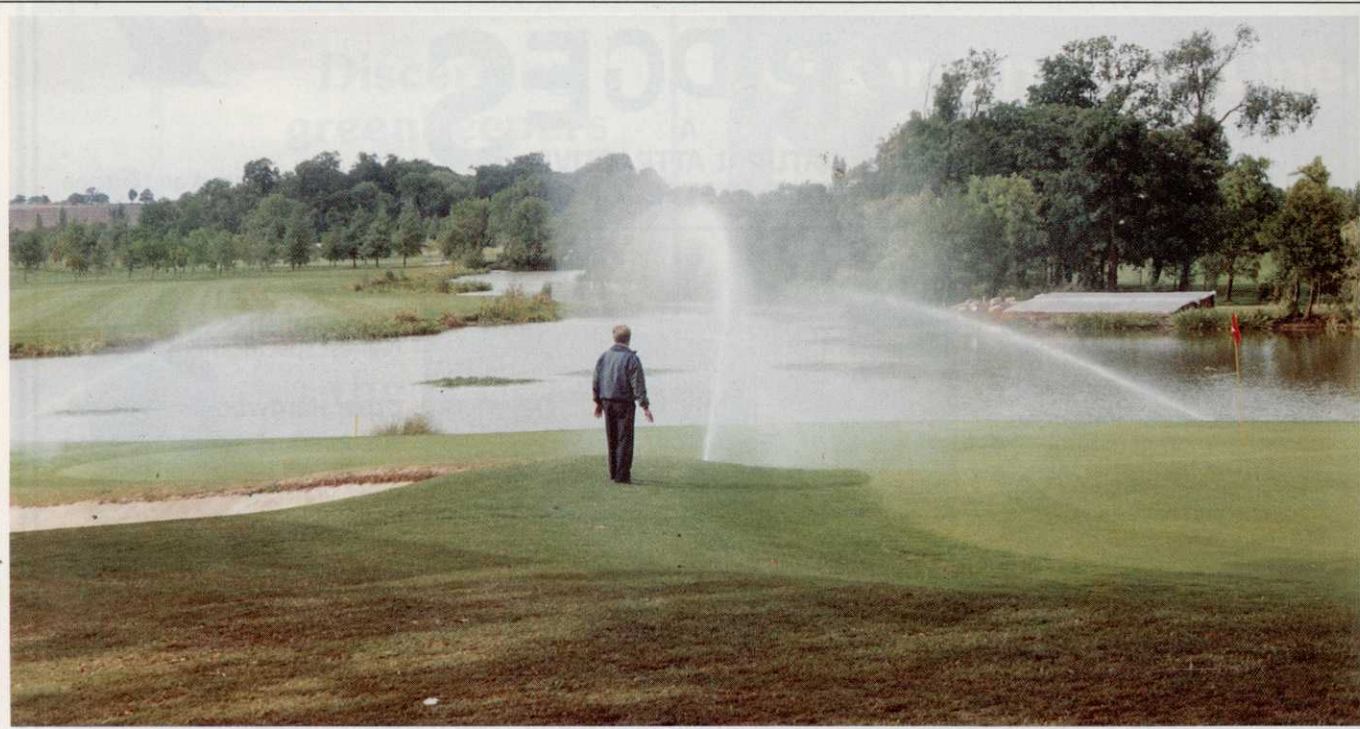
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## ON THE COURSE



Testing the irrigation at the 18th green

# The Belfry prepares to defend the Ryder Cup

John Lelean takes a look at the Belfry just days before the match of the year

**W**hen the Ryder Cup teams return to The Belfry this month they will find a few changes since the Cup was last played for over the Brabazon Course in 1985. Not so much with the course, though more about that later, but the hotel and leisure complex is far grander, more luxurious and certainly more expensive. Two new residential blocks have been constructed, fitting in with the existing complex as if they had been there for years and this, complemented by a complete upgrading and refurbishing of all the facilities of the Belfry will provide the perfect setting for what is expected to be the most exciting contest since Samuel Ryder donated his trophy 62 years ago.

The interest in this year's matchplay contest, simmering for months, is now approaching the boil on both the European and American continents. It has been said that the Americans, so used to winning all before them, lose interest in international events until they are beaten. With that thought in mind it is worth noting that the three major golf team trophies, the Ryder Cup, the Walker Cup and the Curtis Cup are all on this side of the Atlantic. Add to that Nick Faldo's Masters' title won at August earlier this year and it is not difficult to appreciate that Ray-

mond Floyd's team are out for revenge.

Back in 1985, Derek Ganning, was the Head Greenkeeper-Superintendent, a fairly apt Americanised title, considering his greens were sown on pure sand with Pencross. Four years on he is known as the Course Manager with Sam Hagen as his working Head Greenkeeper.

What he has achieved is quite phenomenal when considering the past lashings the Belfry courses received from the critics. Comments such as "a featureless soggy farmland" and a "treeless barren wilderness" were two of the more charitable that can be recalled to mind.

The Alliss and Thomas design has taken more than its fair share of "stick" by those who have played badly looking for the excuse, but also from others who should have been constructive with their criticism rather than damning the Belfry for the sheer hell of it.

Twelve years later, plus the injection of a vast amount of money by Greenall Whitley, the Belfry has matured into a magnificent golf course, a view confirmed by PGA Tournament Director Tony Gray, who told Derek just days before the match, that the Brabazon was "the best presented course

he had seen in Europe this year".

Back in June, the English Open was played over the Brabazon, a tournament which the Belfry could have well done without. Only those managing a tournament course can appreciate the disturbance and interruption caused by the preparation of spectator facilities and their removal after the event. Competitor Tony Jacklin, putting on his captain's hat was quoted as saying - "The fairways were too fast and the greens were too slow. We may have had a dry spring and summer, but that is now excuse".

Whether Derek Ganning made an answering comment to that remark is not on record, but most of our readers would hole in one in any contest to predict his reply.

Although there has been some minor changes to the layout in the past four years, the course will be virtually the same as in 1985. A new fourth tee to the right of the existing tee has been constructed specifically for this match, forcing more of a draw over the edge of a recently constructed irrigation lake. Hit the water and the golfer will not only lose the ball, but incur the wrath of Derek Ganning for disturbing his colony of rainbow trout!

There is an additional water hazard also to the right of the short 7th where



## ON THE COURSE

an existing drainage stream has been cleared, widened and a number of dead trees removed from an overgrown copse. A flock of Canada geese are more than happy with the new arrangements.

One other change has been the removal of a mature chestnut at the edge of the 18th fairway, blown down in the gales. In some way this is a blessing in disguise for both spectators and players as it opens up the view from the tee making it easier to see the well hit shot.

When Head Greenkeeper Sam Hagan was asked what special maintenance has been completed in preparation for the Ryder Cup, he said the Belfry courses receive intensive maintenance all the time. However, as this event is the peak of the golfing year, all their efforts have been geared to prepare the Brabazon to perfection for mid September.

Tees and greens have been scarified,



Derek stands beside the commemorative tree to mark the 1985 Ryder Cup



Head Greenkeeper Sam Hagan with the two Sisis Autorakes used to scarify the greens

top dressed and would be receiving a "Ganning Secret Feed" three weeks before the event. The bunkers have been edged and replenished with Moneystone White and last year the irrigation system was upgraded with the Toro 3000 system.

One of the principle purchases this year has been the Australian made Coremaster, complete with sets of quadra tines, half inch tines and three quarter inch slit tines. "This machine was an excellent buy", said Derek Ganning. He also purchased a John Deere Compact tractor which has proved to be "beautiful machine".

He also has a Jacobsen Diesel Greens King, complete with verti-cut reels and grooming units, which is currently used to cut the sand greens prior to the start of the contest. Once the matches start the greens will be cut twice a day by hand with his three Loyds Paladin machines.

Cutting will take place in the early morning and again around lunch-time before the start of the afternoon

matches, though Derek was reluctant to be drawn on the height of the cut or the stimpmeter speed to be achieved. What is certain, if the opposition are expecting similar speeds to those at Augusta, they are likely to be disappointed!

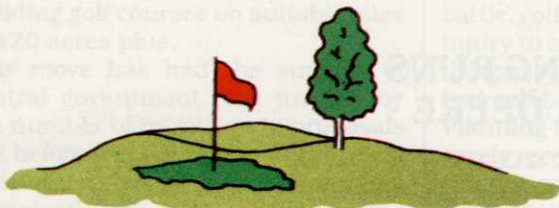
Staffing levels of around forty or fifty were reported at Muirfield Village, plus casuals during the match. Just for the record, the two Belfry courses are maintained by Derek and Sam in a supervisory capacity, six greenkeepers, one full-time mechanic, one man spending most of his time on the irrigation system and two YTS trainees, who are following the block release City & Guild syllabus.

As for the bunker raking and divoting, local pensioners will be on hand, happy to do the job for a monogrammed sweater plus a couple of rounds of golf. Just one more point - There is a special message for Jimmy Kidd at Gleneagles from The Belfry staff: "Watch for our colourful announcement under the score board at the 18th!"

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## Golf course expansion bunkered by bureaucracy

Despite a known need for 500 more courses in Britain, John Lelean finds that minority self interest and local planners are blocking development

**T**he "set-aside" scheme offered to British farmers which grants aids taking land out of food production, has led to a number of land-owners examining the viability of building golf courses on suitable sites of 120 acres plus.

This move has had the support of central government, but judging by the number of rejections to proposals put before local planning authorities, often supported by vociferous and well organised adjacent residents, the policy is not receiving endorsement at local level.

A land owner at Scarborough raised a storm of protest when he applied to construct an 18 hole golf course within

the boundaries of the holiday resort, including opposition from an adjacent farmer.

The reasons put forward for objection included; golfers would frighten the cattle, golf balls hit off line could cause injury to stock and there was also the danger of cattle inadvertently eating lost golf balls with the grass!

Planning applications for golf courses rarely receive consent without opposition from one source or another. Whether it is from local residents who adopt the attitude "not in my backyard", highway authorities saying the access will be dangerous or the roads unsuitable for increased traffic, desecration of areas of natural beauty

or visual intrusion by the construction of a club house and car park facilities.

If these objections are overcome then there is always the fallback ploy of "creating pressure for further development."

**B**ecause golf courses require a large area of open agricultural or park land, nearby existing residential development is invariably up market, extensive and expensive. The owners regard any new development as a gross intrusion on their privacy and are prepared to seek every

*Continued on page 29*



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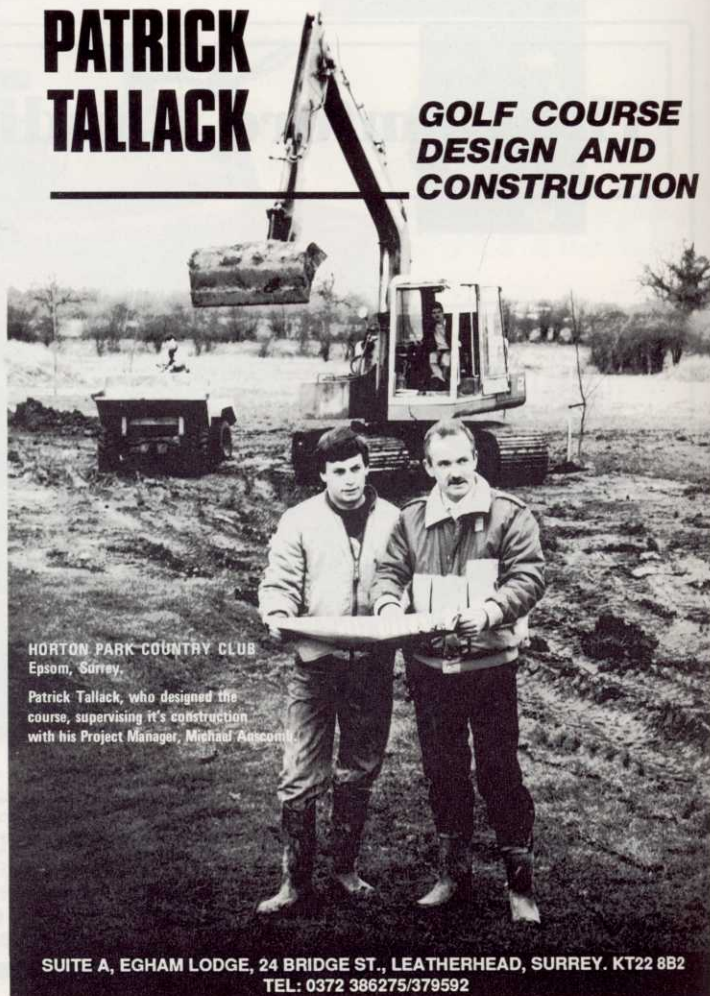
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## DEVELOPMENT

means at their disposal to resist replacing a couple of hundred grazing sheep with a similar number of visiting golfers. If the viability of course construction is dependent on raising finance from house building similar to their own, then the outcry can be heard to the twon hall steps.

Hard information on planning application for proposed golf course developments is difficult to obtain, because planning officials at local level do not have to notify central government of either plans submitted, approved or rejected.

The only time the Secretary of State for the Environment becomes involved is when an applicant appeals against a rejection by the local planning authority.

The appeal can be made in one of two ways. The first is by means of a public inquiry when an inspector is appointed by the Secretary of State to consider the written and oral representations from the potential developer and hear the counter objections of the area planning authority, as well as other interested parties such as parish councils, local residents preservation societies or amenity groups.

This is potentially expensive, as both sides with much at stake, bring out the "big guns" by way of eloquent counsel, incurring legal costs sometimes running into thousands of pounds.

The second method and by far the cheaper is to proceed by a written submissions at a "closed appeal", where an inspector considers the evidence from both sides, visits the site, may ask questions, but is not available to listen to arguments either for or against. He makes his recommendation purely on the facts as he

sees them.

Earlier this year Mr Peter Dutton, the President of the English Golf Union called for the building of 500 new courses in Britain just to keep pace with demand. He also announced the setting up of a four man Golf Development Committee to study ways and means of expanding golf in England. They also find information hard to come by, as planning officers are under no obligation to tell the EGU or the Sports Council of plans submitted, accepted or rejected. They obtain most of their information from farmers and developers looking for official backing or help and so far this year there have been 127 individual inquiries, directed toward the English Golf Union.

### *Not behind my garden says greenbelt residents*

Until the EGU set up the Golf Development Committee there has been no co-ordinating body since the Golf Development Council was closed down some years ago. It is possible that a sympathetic authority could grant permission for several courses within a small area, none of which when built, could be financially viable in the face of local competition.

**N**ew courses involve a massive capital outlay without the opportunity to recouped any investment within three years, this is why developers are seeking to tie residential housing, hotels and a sports

complex into the overall scheme. Collingtree Park at Northampton is a case in point as is Titherington Links near Macclesfield, both developing into fine golf courses with the finance raised from sales of property.

Although central government have offered grants to farmers for the development of other leisure enterprises on surplus land, golf was ruled out from the start. So without a capital sum from the likes of Wimpey, Barrett or Ideal Homes, a pure golf course developer is looking for at least £1m up front without any opportunity to produce any income for at least three years.

It hardly needs the use of a pocket calculator to estimate if the capital has to be borrowed, the sum required is more realistically £1.5m.

Once the course and club house are open, financial costs, repayments, staff and maintenance costs, could amount to £.25m a year. What is left could be called profit. There must be easier ways of making a good living!

It is right that all development schemes should be examined in detail, but too often local authorities are attempting to maintain the status quo without any justification.

It cannot be on grounds of conservation as golf courses are probably the most protected areas for wild life, where a balance of nature can live virtually threat free.

The Golf Course Wildlife trust, set up in 1987, is a body that promotes nature conservancy and is willing and able to give impartial advice to both planners, owners and those who maintain golf courses.

On all new courses trees are planted in large numbers, streams and ponds maintained for fish and water birds,

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## DEVELOPMENT

the grass is cut neater than most people's private lawn, areas of rough support wild fauna, fringes are left for birds, animals and insects to exist completely undisturbed. What is more it opens up land for the population at large to enjoy.

The Southern Region of the Sports Council have recently published the results of a survey \*Providing For Golf in the Southern Region. They contacted 103 established private commercial and municipal courses and received an 81% response. The findings are set out in a 28 page booklet, which is essential reading for anyone contemplating constructing a golf course or extending an existing layout.

They found membership in the private clubs ranged from 350 to over 1,000 where the club supported two courses. In the area of the survey, from Buckinghamshire in the north to the Isle of Wight, including Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Hampshire 59 of the private clubs out of the 70 who responded had a waiting list for membership, extending from six months to ten years.

Few were able to provide accurate figures of the number of rounds per annum, though the pay and play courses reported from 24,000 on a nine hole course to over 64,000 on a 18 + 9 complex. Although firm statistics were not available it was obvious that the combination of member rounds plus visiting parties and green fee casuals put considerable pressure on course maintenance.

The survey also discovered thirty-two of the courses planned additional facilities either by clubhouse improvements or course extensions, but did not discover whether such proposed expansion had encountered opposition.

**T**he main conclusions drawn from the survey by the Southern Region of the Sports Council are as follows:-

*The demand for golf in the region is not being met by the existing facilities.*

*Many more commercial pay and play and municipal courses are required to cater for the beginners at golf and more clubs are needed to accommodate those who have developed a proficiency at the sport.*

*One of the major obstacles facing those who wish to build new courses or extend existing ones comes from local planning authorities.*

*The necessary initial financial outlay by developers, could lead to cut backs in the essentials of drainage and infrastructure and landowners intending building a golf course should obtain the services of qualified consultants.*

*If more facilities are not provided, golf will remain the preserve of the privileged few, fortunate to be members of a private club.*

The South Western Council for Sport and Recreation have also published the results of an even more extensive survey in a \*Strategy Document, conducted during 1987, covering all counties west of Wiltshire, where the total population is over 4.5 million, and expecting to rise by a further .25 million, by 1991.

The 1987 survey estimates there were 108 courses with 18 holes and 26 nine hole courses throughout the South

## EGU regional officers report

**R**ay Baldwin from the Midland Region reports that he has received 54 enquiries for either new golf course developments or extensions to existing layouts, but to his knowledge only four are actually under construction, others are awaiting planning permission or at the feasibility study stage. The courses under construction are all on farm land, where the farmers have decided to diversify.

Among the proposals within the Midland area 31 are for 18-hole courses, two of 27-holes and four golf complexes. He has given advice for a putting green for a retired persons leisure complex.

**I**n the South West, John Goodban has also received some 50 enquiries, but few have yet come to fruition, though he knows of two new courses at Clovelly and Libbaton plus a driving range in the Ilfracombe area. A new course has been approved in Cornwall and is about to commence construction outside Lostwithiel, to be called the Restormel Golf and Country Club.

However, planning approval for the rebuilding of a golf course at Lynton has twice been rejected.

**I**n the 14 countries of the South East, which includes the Channel Islands, Guy Shenstone says he has replied to over 40 enquiries from potential developers, the majority, farmers, looking to take land out of food production, by building 'rough' pay as you play, 9-hole and some 18-hole courses. He believes professional developers, within the hotel industry are seeking advice elsewhere and others who should be contacting the EGU are going ahead without realising the value of available assistance at their disposal.

**B**ill Murray in the northern section of the country also reports a number of active enquiries, eighteen

he has inspected personally.

He believes local planning officers without experience of golf course development are not aware of the nature conservancy benefits that can be safeguarded from the construction of golf courses and they also are not coming to the English Golf Union for what is in effect free advice.

He said he knows of a potential three course development near Billingham on the borders of Durham and Cleveland where the master mind behind the Gateshead Metro Centre has some 6,000 acres of land at his disposal.

Bill also pointed out that farmers who intend obtaining the grant under the set-aside scheme should be aware that the £80 an acre grant only applies to grade 2 or better land.

"We can offer a great deal of help and point both developers of new courses and clubs exploring expansion in the right direction, if they would only contact us", added Bill Murray.

This would seem to be sound advice as all new courses will eventually seek affiliation to their county association. It is better to ensure the layouts and yardages are correct from the outset, rather than become involved in expensive alterations later.

### English Golf Union Development Committee:

**South West** - J. W. D. Goodban O.B.E. (Chairman) Applegarth, Hills View, East Hill, Braunton, North Devon. EX33 2LE Tel: 0271 814405

**South East** - G. G. Shenstone, 25 Kings Court, Kings Road, Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex. SSO8LL Tel: 0702 352722

**North** - W.P. Murray, Highnam Lodge, Park Mews, Hartlepool TS26 ODX Tel: 0429 273185

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