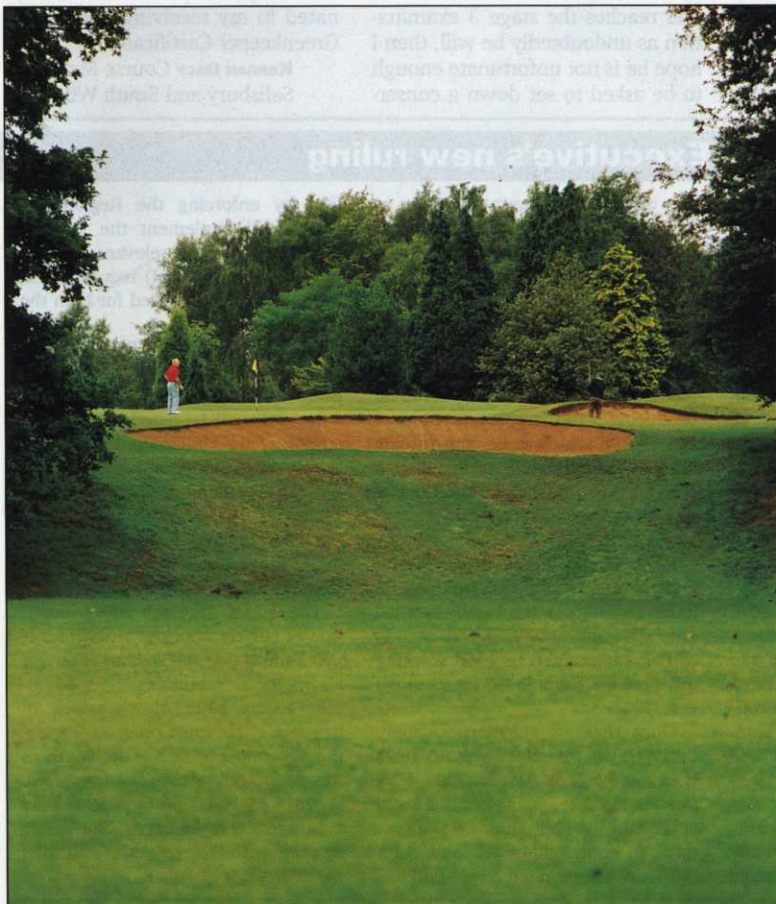


# In the



DAVID WHITE visits Coventry Golf Club and meets the man “with the longest temporary job in the Midlands” – head greenkeeper JOHN BAYLISS (pictured)



First impressions count. The occasional visitor to Coventry Finham Park, coming upon the course for the first time, could not fail to be impressed by the prettiness of the place. Located just a couple of miles from the city centre and almost in the shadow of the Warwick/Kenilworth by-pass, the course is a haven of very well kept trees, hundreds and hundreds of them, many of mature age. There are large and venerable oaks, mature beeches and chestnuts, plus others of more recent vintage: conifers, silver birch, evergreens, acers, cherry and whitebeam. It is a veritable haven of arboriculture and the knowledgeable will be struck by the great care taken in their upkeep, the mature specimens neatly strimmed at their bases, younger brethren properly cleared and given breathing space to grow and prosper.

Granted, prettiness alone cannot turn an inferior golf course into a good one or make it a proper test of golfing skills, but at Finham Park the care is apparent in presenting this delightful parkland setting as a very proper golfing examination: a layout where thinking and plotting will bring hugely satisfying results. There is room on many occasions for the player to open his shoulders, with five par fives and nine par fours, and the aforementioned trees, along with natural ponds at the 6th, 7th and 14th holes and the meandering river Sowe are, to say the least, strategic rather than penal. That stated, Finham Park is not a place to wander too far off line, for therein lies the devil in waiting...

Who do we have to thank for all this strategic magnificence? Obviously the original course architect, Tom Vardon, brother of the great Harry, must have seen the cunning and logic in utilising Finham Park's natural contours, streams and original trees. Add to this the divine inspiration of six times Open Champion Harry Vardon in planning all the bunker locations (after all, who better than he in deciding where a bunker should or shouldn't be?), plus a concerted programme of tree planting in the fifties and donated saplings (memorials to deceased members) adding to the total that continues to grow, both in number and intensity.

Further, there is more than a touch of Fred Hawtree's magic in the layout, for it was he who designed the new 9th and 10th holes that replaced those lost to the Kenilworth by-pass in 1964, along with a general re-designing to bring the 9th and 18th greens back in close proximity to the new elevated and balconied clubhouse.

Those fortunate to have battled through the ranks of qualifying into the final of the Iseki Tournament will be in no doubt that Coventry Finham Park is a fitting place for a very grand, grand finale. It is to head greenkeeper John Bayliss and his dedicated crew of eight – including two part-timers and a talented full-time gardener – that much of the credit must be awarded.

John has seen a few changes in his 22 years at the Club, a job he took at the age of 17 as a temporary 'fill-in' – “the longest temporary job in the Midlands”, as he now describes it. He has been the head greenkeeper for four years, answerable to a green committee of six or so with, naturally enough, the occasional contentious 'demand' from the rank and file – “but we have a course management policy document that is pretty well set to be the bible”, he said, “and though this is in draft stage right now, once established it will provide all that is necessary to ensure that a programme once scheduled will be implemented without diversion”.

I understand the Coventry policy document came as a direct result of green committee members attending a recent seminar, which extolled the virtues of both policy making and continuity. It is to the Club's credit that they have chosen to take this first step to an enlightened route. To illustrate a point on earlier 'about turn' directives, resulting through changes in committee (and therefore opinion), John pointed to the case of a bunker that was first ordered to be levelled, then raised to a grassy hollow, then back to a bunker and yes, you've guessed it, now it's a grassy hollow again. “I hope it stays that way”, he grinned.

Rightly so, John attends every green committee meeting and presents a monthly progress report for comment and approval.



# DRIVING seat

He's computerised and keeps all his records, charts and irrigation data on his own Omega – in a nutshell, one could say he is on-the-ball!

We touched on relationships with the Club: were they good to work for? "It would be untrue if I didn't say there were communication problems back in the earlier days of my career here", he said, "but from a period of 'them and us' in the seventies we've come full circle to a wonderful and totally open situation where communication is all – The secretary, Mr Jarman, is quite splendid in that respect and we are never left in the dark – yes, they're a grand membership and I'm very happy".

Coventry Golf Club and John Bayliss are no strangers to the big event, for this popular venue has hosted many professional tournaments – including the Teachers Seniors, the Coca-Cola Young Professionals and the WPGA Carlsberg Tournaments – along with the larger motor trade jamborees staged by local manufacturers Jaguar and Peugeot. In addition, the course regularly attracts golfing societies and 'company days' and these groups take to the tee about twice a week.

Unlike many Midland Clubs, Coventry has no water problems. Quite apart from a spring in the pond at the third, from which the Club is licenced by the NRA to extract a maximum of 8,000 gallons a day (restricted at present), they are perhaps most blessed in being within 2,000m of pipeline from a Severn Trent Water Authority re-cycling plant. They buy such treated water – which goes through an ultra violet process to eliminate nasty microbes – at an advantageous price and the deal provides for upwards of a million gallons a year. With full tees and greens Watermation TW3 irrigation, together with the natural location of the course in a sheltered and sometimes humid valley, growth is rarely other than lush. This is one course where green is the predominant colour.

Greenkeepers competing in the Iseki final will certainly not be disappointed with the Coventry Golf Club. When their round is over they will find added pleasure in watching other competitors pull up the eighteenth, a lovely finishing hole with a fairway that leans gently to the right, coaxing pulls and slices into the silver birches – all this may be viewed from the elevated first floor lounge, high up on the course and perfectly placed for armchair critics.

## COVENTRY GC PREPARES FOR ISEKI FINALS



### MAJOR MACHINERY IN THE COVENTRY STABLE

- 4 Massey Ferguson Tractors
- 1 Iseki Compact Tractor
- 2 Toro Triplex's (GM3 and GM3000D)
- 1 Jacobsen Triplex
- 6 Ransomes Auto Certes hand mowers
- 1 Ransomes mounted 5 gang mower
- 1 Lloyds mounted 5 gang mower
- 1 Toro Scarifier reel unit
- 1 Toro Greens cutting unit
- Sisis Sprayer attachment
- Sisis Grader/slitler
- Sisis mole plough
- Muratori rotavator
- Royer Soil shredder
- Modus 'T' Spreader for Iseki
- Ryan Turfcutter/Mataway scarifier