

The first ever Hayter Challenge Tournament Final takes place in September at Sand Moor, a venue brimming with history and a course which is a real delight, reports DAVID WHITE

There surely cannot be a greenkeeper who will not have heard of, or indeed who will not in some way hold in awe, the name of Doctor Alister Mackenzie, that cleverest of golf course architects and acknowledged master of the ingenious green contour and enticing sculptured bunker. Who though, outside of a handful of the keenest golfing historians, will register so much as a scrap of recognition for the Leeds clothier, Henry Barran? I can almost hear my readers' mind cranking into overtime, wondering what possible bearing this line of introduction can have on the Hayter Challenge Tournament Final.

Yet at Sand Moor Golf Club on the outskirts of Leeds, those players who have fought the good fight to qualify for the first ever Hayter Challenge will be privileged to witness one of perhaps the finest marriages of minds, though they will sample a mere 'taster' on the first hole and then be held in suspense until the par four 358 yard fifth before again walking the hallowed and relatively unaltered ground upon which Mackenzie and Barran enacted their joint masterpiece.

Local legend has it that Henry Barran made his fortune in the clothing trade, as a result becoming a landowner of magnitude, many a cres of which overlooked picturesque Wharfedale. He also boasted a wife who was the archetypal lady golfer of the day, keen to play all the hours that God created but without a patch to call her very own – enter Barran, the golf course developer.

Owning the blessed land upon which Sand Moor is now located, Barran decided that a golf course of considerable magnificence should be constructed, one that would complement the remarkable views toward the adjacent Eccup Reservoir. One may surmise that Barran's contribution was both fiscal and practical (it is written that he 'laid out' the course), and imagine that he also demanded the best that money could buy. Above all, it is suggested that he decreed the club would take ladies into the fold and that they would enjoy equal rights with gentlemen players – this at a time when many ladies were struggling merely to be allowed through the clubhouse door. Was this, one wonders, an early case of a captain of industry falling under petticoat rule? Perhaps it is better we do not know.

Sadly, any records that may have existed in the early twenties concerning those commissioned to undertake the actual landscaping and shaping work, the Brian Pierson's of the day so to speak, do not exist. What is worse, there is nary a mention of Dr Mackenzie's input into Sand Moor's design brilliance in any of my cluster of books on famous architects and their golf courses. It matters not, for one has only to walk any of the fourteen original



holes remaining to see Mackenzie writ large, as clearly individual as, say, the buildings of Inigo Jones or the paintings of Pablo Picasso.

The Sand Moor course is different from its near neighbours, all almost within a good brassie shot of each other – Alwoodley, Moortown, Moor Allerton – in that the sub-soil consists of sand and sandstone. Hence its name! It is nurtured (not too strong a word) by head greenkeeper Bobby Barnes, as dedicated a man as ever I met and one who has been in charge of Sand Moor for approaching thirty

years, knowledgeable to the extent that in listening to him one senses he knows every single blade on Sand Moor's 110 acres, rather like a shepherd knows his sheep.

Bobby was around in the sixties when the original course was split in two by Alwoodley Lane, with the clubhouse and the first two and last holes on one side of the lane and the remaining fourteen on the other. The committee of the day decided that changes were called for and additional land was acquired to bring all eighteen holes onto the north side of

ENJOY IT!

the lane. To all but the fiercest Mackenzie devotee those new holes, now with number jockeying known as the second, third, fourth and thirteenth, are very good indeed, but I am sure the members of Sand Moor will forgive me if I dare to suggest that they lack that certain something which only Mackenzie could have fashioned, though we all appreciate that when the good doctor rode Time's winged chariot the mould was broken.

By way of recompense, if my criticism of the new appears harsh, praise must in like fashion go to Bobby Barnes for his interpretation and introduction of several 'Mackenzie style' concepts, with my applause in particular reserved for his clever work on and around the thirteenth green! On that score, I am a push-over when I meet folk who share my passion for classic golf architecture – I didn't need Bobby to wax lyrical over his golf course, for having done my homework in the library I was sold on Sand Moor before we met. That stated, I enjoyed and was held spell-bound by the man, once begun never daring to cut him short. The thought crossed my mind several times, I'm in the presence of a true believer, a worshipper at the Mackenzie Temple and a greater admirer of the man's work than me – and it shows!

Bobby Barnes is a dyed-in-the-wool countryman, by his own admission one who might just as happily have been a gamekeeper, certainly one who is never more content than when at work on the golf course or at play on the Yorkshire moors, invariably accompanied by the beloved gun dogs he breeds for game shooting work. Conversely, had the timing been different he had the raw golfing talent to have followed in his father's footsteps, a pro golfer who was attached to Sand Moor for most of his life. Bobby told me of the day that inspiration for work in golf course management finally struck him – out on the practice ground, watching a greenkeeper at work – and thinking how much he would like to be doing that fellow's job. Now this is a complete reversal of the more common scenario, that of the greenkeeper who would almost kill to be a professional golfer, but he grins when he says he'd have likely starved for all the lack of cash there was in tournament golf when he was a youngster, a winner's cheque then rarely exceeding fifty pounds!

So the loss to pro golf of Bobby Barnes was a win for greenkeeping; and if proof be needed of the wisdom of such action those thirty or more years ago, one need look no further than Sand Moor itself. Not only is it a delicious place upon which to tee the ball, but it also boasts the finest practice facilities, hard by the clubhouse and only yards from the first tee, with length enough to take the longest of

drives. It is also a breeding place of champions, boasting two British Amateur titleists in Alex Kyle (1939) and Iain Pyman (1993), along with a star line-up of County, National and Walker Cup players and including no less than two Walker Cup team members in this year's event at Interlachen, Minneapolis – Iain Pyman and Stuart Cage. If all this isn't enough, the club's cup of cheer overflowed in July when at Royal St George's Iain Pyman became the lowest scoring amateur player ever in the whole history of The Open... and one may hope that a smidgen of Iain's talent may magically rub off onto the Hayter Champion, Sand Moor being a magical sort of place!

Bobby Barnes is no newcomer to preparing the big event, for Sand Moor has played host to many a championship. Nick Faldo won the Car Care International there in 1983, edging out Howard Clark by one stroke, both leaving Seve, Sandy and Bernhard in their wake, whilst in the club's Jubilee year (1986) the PGA Assistant's staged their own Championship and were honoured to have Henry Cotton return to watch them and admire the course where 51 years earlier he'd won the Yorkshire Evening News Tournament. Sandwiched between these 'named' championships there have been countless county and regional events and these have all been taken in Bobby's inimitable stride.

In thirty years, like any greenkeeper on earth, he's seen both ups and downs in course management and has succeeded in riding many a hiccup. Thus it would be churlish of me not to mention that the 1993 season began for Bobby in less than perfect fashion. Drawing a comparison to illustrate the reason why Sand Moor's delicious fescue dominant greens suddenly and mysteriously began to lose their

sparkle, Bobby likened the situation to that of a health conscious dieter who, without realising, oversteps the balance and becomes ill rather feeling better. In his view, following a recommended phosphate free regime, the greens in a remarkably short space of time came near to being anorexic before being nursed back to good health, though I am pleased to report that Bobby's sinking feeling, one that must at some time hit every greenkeeper when something inexplicable happens and the reasons are not crystal clear, has passed. That stated, Bobby will tell you that the first six months of 1993 have been the most difficult in all of his greenkeeping career, a period which he has no wish to experience ever again.

Picking selected holes for Hayter Challenge Tournament players to savour, I would suggest that all the short holes, the par threes, warrant careful examination, in particular the 186 yard eighth, which is regarded as the toughest, and the 173 yard tenth, which is a classic hole in any language. Take special note also of the par four 13th, for it has much of Bobby Barnes stamped upon it, and save your best for the par five 16th, which with its elevated green set into a hillside is considered by many to be Sand Moor's finest. Finally, enjoy the tremendous closing hole, an uphill drive between O.B. on the left and trees on the right and a second shot where you must deliver accurately in order to avoid the cluster of bunkers on the left of the green, two of which are Bobby Barnes' own creations, though built in true Mackenzie-like fashion. I defy you not to relish this golf course, which fully deserves its description – 'the finest example of a golfing paradise being created out of barren moor'.



Pictured left, the Sand Moor GC clubhouse; above, some of MacKenzie's bunkers