

With a crumbling coastline nibbling at the edges, Barton-on-Sea Golf Club had little choice but to move inland. Course manager Tony Gadd tells Cedric Johns how he handled the task – and kept 18 holes open for play throughout

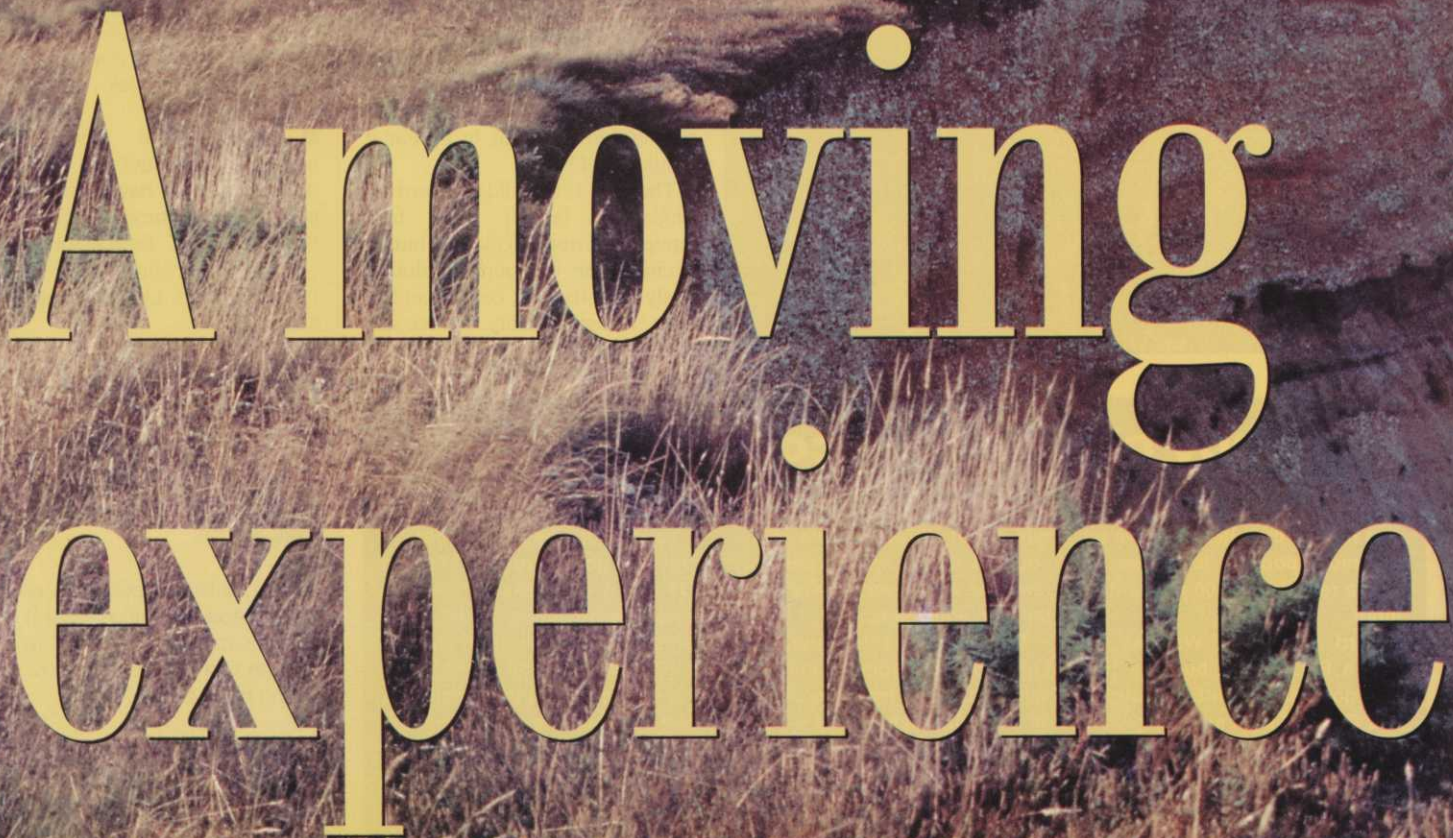
When Tony Gadd was appointed course manager at the Barton-on-Sea Golf Club, his brief was simple and straight to the point. Call-in a contractor or manage the project yourself, he was told. Given the choice, Tony decided to put his reputation on the line. He opted to plan and control events, using his experience and judgement to achieve the success his new employers had spent years planning for.

The project? To rebuild, extend and revitalise a 95-year-old cliff-top golf course threatened by a crumbling coastline, move it inland and turn it into a modern, 27-hole complex, complete with brand new clubhouse; at a total cost of £2 million.

Apart from the importance of selecting a group of reliable sub-contractors, this entailed planning the movement of tens of thousands of tons of soil, pegging-out three nine-hole loops, recycling spoil to build features, updating drainage, extending the irrigation system, overseeing progressive seeding and turfing, coping with all the relevant paperwork, maintaining phased work schedules – and making sure that each stage was completed to budget.

Anything else? “Yes”, said the club’s management committee, “It is essential that you keep 18-holes open for play at all times.” Some brief, some welcome back to this country! Prior to joining the Hampshire club, Tony had spent a decade out of the country gaining invaluable experience helping to build and manage golf courses in Africa and central Europe.

During that period of his life, he learned to cope with arid heat and tropical downpours (which washed away entire fairways) in the Ivory



A moving experience

Coast and the teeth-chattering contrast of mid-European winter temperatures plunging to -20°C or more.

In Germany, melting snow and continuous rains combined to flood his Schloss Weitnburg course to the point where, as the waters subsided, trout were discovered swimming in the bunkers.

On the face of it then, Tony Gadd's move to the English south coast appeared to offer many advantages; a pleasantly mild climate, a team of professional sub-contractors at his disposal plus the bonus of established support in the shape of a six-man team led by head 'keeper Bob Parsons.

The reality was different! The Barton project turned out to be the biggest challenge of his life, he told me. "But I don't regret a moment of it."

One of Tony's main headaches was – and still is – wind erosion. During one particularly stormy night, high winds blowing in off the sea shifted an inch of carefully laid seeded soil. Within days, freshly sanded bunkers turned a pale shade of green.

"I didn't use covers. If I had, they would only have ended up floating in the bay".

Storm-force winds are not the everyday norm at Barton but the Solent channel can be fickle. Light winds suddenly turn into squalls gusting to a strength four or five; enough to cause soil movement.

When this happened, Tony and his team had to forget whatever they had planned. For a period, raking, over-seeding, light rolling and watering were daily necessities.

Yet just a few paces further inland, where the course was extended

away from the crumbling cliffs, heavier farm soil resisting the affects of the winds threw-up another challenge. Weeds.

Classified as Grade 'D' farmland, the soil was alive with camomile, white flowering clover, plantains and a botanists' book full of other species. On top of that, the owner, a local farmer had, in Tony's estimation, only paid lip service to drainage. "That was a whole new ball game," he commented with a wry smile.

Water was an important priority. Acknowledging his scant knowledge of the technicalities of irrigation system design, Tony readily agreed to let ISS (Irrigation Contracts) take responsibility for this aspect of the development.

They had installed Barton's original system; they knew the ropes. "We had to plan and re-plan the new system depending on the various stages of construction and seeding," says Gary Parker, whose company adapted and extended old with new over a twelve month period.

In addition to setting-up a temporary pump station, repositioning pipelines and re-assessing application rates on a weekly basis, the ISS installation team was not helped when the odd JCB dug-up newly laid pipe or, in one heart-stopping escapade, pulled up what seemed like miles of cable!

There was a time when even Tony admitted he was desperate for water – for seeded fairways not included in the irrigation plan. "I was seriously thinking of hiring bowsers but then it rained – and rained."

Talking of seeding, Tony told me that he planted a traditional mixture of fescue and creeping bent on the greens and tees, pre-mixed fes-





The new club house at Barton-on-Sea

BARTON LOGISTICS

Rebuilding the Barton-on-Sea golf course involved the following statistics – according to Tony Gadd's records; dated May '91–June '92.

Earth: 250,000 sq yds moved
 Stone: 5,000 tons used for drainage and stone carpets
 Water: 2.5million gallons stored in six lakes of varying size
 Machinery: five bulldozers, eight slewing excavators, one mini-digger, two JCB wheeled excavators, one wheeled shovel, four 22-ton dump trucks, two continuous trenchers, five agricultural tractors
 Fuel: 24,167 gallons of diesel
 Labour: 43 operators – plus one water diviner
 Man hours: 14,970
 Accidents: None

COURSE EQUIPMENT

MOWERS

Huxley – two 358 greens mowers
 Huxley – one 358 for tees and approaches
 Ransome – one 180D for surrounds
 Brouwer – one hydraulic 5-gang mower for fairways
 Brouwer – one trailed gang mower
 Ransome – 350D for semi-rough and rough
 John Deere – Front line rotary for rough
 Ransome – one 24in motorised mower
 Auto Certes – Three motor mowers
 Allen Flymo – four brushcutters

BUNKER RAKES

John Deere – one bunker rake
 Ransome – one bunker rake

In addition to the above, a (very old) Ransome 171 model is used for verti-cutting.

TRACTORS

John Deere 1750 with powerloader
 Ford 3600
 Massey Ferguson

TRUCKSTERS

Cushman – three vehicles with attachments

IRRIGATION

27 greens, tees and approaches – Toro 650 independent head control sprinklers, computerised AquaFlow control system designed, installed and maintained by ISS (Irrigation Contracts) Ltd.

cue bent and smooth stalk on the fairways.

Rooting zones comprise a 80/20 sand-soil mix fifteen inches deep over a stone carpet and herring-bone drains.

Constructing a new golf course was one thing but equally important, the day-to-day task of maintaining the 18 holes in play kept everyone on their toes!

In the event, this was achieved by the use of just two temporary greens. Nevertheless, the integration of existing holes with new ones was, as Tony described it, "Most difficult but we won through – thanks mainly to Bob's local knowledge – and the rest of the team who got stuck in and produced the required results."

In the final analysis, only seven of Barton's old greens were retained to meet the design mapped out on golf course architect Hamilton Stutt's blueprint. Twenty new ones were constructed as part of the main development programme which lasted for around 14 months.

Water storage was another vital consideration. This problem was part and parcel of the thinking which lay behind the excavation of a large ornamental lake alongside the new clubhouse.

But this was not any old ornamental lake. It features an island green – the 18th when played in competitions – surrounded by something like two million gallons of water. Before it was filled, the ISS installation crew lined it with a pressure resisting PVC-based liner. £20,000 worth, according to Tony Gadd's inventory.

Interestingly, a water diviner was brought in to help source natural supplies. He quickly found an underground lake which, with a

nearby spring, provides enough 'liquid gold' to keep both the ornamental lake and five other, smaller lakes dotted around the golf course and its perimeter, full.

Not that water was at much of a premium this winter! For the first time in recent memory, the course was closed for 16 days after a couple of months' rainfall fell in a matter of days. Even the free draining clifftop soil couldn't absorb that amount. It was then that the prevailing wind – the cause of many other troubles, suddenly became a friend indeed...

From day one, Tony Gadd kept club members fully informed about the progress of the extensive work taking place. "There were a few grumbles but generally speaking, we achieved our dual objectives of creating a new golf course and keeping 18 holes open for play – without any major disasters," he says.

Traffic is heavy at Barton. They (the members) are a hardy breed, I was told. Many play seven days a week and but for an 8am start embargo, popular opinion has it that some of them would be out there at sunrise.

What do the members think of Tony Gadd? Without exception, all those I asked – from management and club captain downwards, undoubtedly have a healthy respect for what he – and his greenkeeping team – have accomplished.

When Richard Branson – he of Virgin Airways fame – dropped in (by personal helicopter) to officially declare the whole project open, last September, Tony and his team were given a special mention coupled with a vote of thanks. But then, that's the way they do things at Barton-on-Sea.



Barton's gang of five: from left, Tony Gadd, course manager, Chris Parsons (greens and fertilisers), Stephen Harris (tees and surrounds), Bob Parsons, head greenkeeper and Robert Hollier (spraying specialist)