



Braid in Scotland

Chris Boiling visits two James Braid designed courses to see what jobs the greenkeeping staff can look forward to this winter

Golfers in the Edinburgh area are spoilt for choice. I certainly was last month when I was looking for an escape from Scots-Turf.

There are so many fine old courses within minutes of the bypass, many around 100 years old and many designed by the

great James Braid. Which one to choose? In the end I decided to visit Broomieknowe and Craigmillar Park, one a parkland course, the other a heathland course that's slowly being turned into parkland. Both are kept by enthusiastic young teams.

Since the weather was cold and wet I left my clubs in the car boot and took out my notebook instead – and went and had a cup of tea with the young head greenkeepers. My aim was simple, to find out what, if anything, they

were planning to do this winter.

Broomieknowe

Broomieknowe is a relatively new course in the area. It is only 88 years old.

The head greenkeeper, Hamish Brough, 36, has been doing a lot of construction work. But he's not complaining: "It's the part I like best because it's the most interesting and challenging."

They've been busy building because a bypass robbed them of half the 5th green (so they had to

build a new one further forward) and half the sixth fairway (so they had to turn a par 5 into a par 3 to allow golfers to play 18 holes while the course was rejigged).

The club bought an arable field adjacent to the course and Stewarts, working to a Hawtree design, built four new greens, four sets of tees, one full fairway and two half fairways

Once phase 1 had been completed, the greenkeeping staff put in a tender for phase 2, to develop the existing bottom field holes and marry them with the new greens and tees. This started two years ago and involved removing hedges, bunkers and greens, and building new tees and greens – while keeping 18 holes open for members.

The new course opened in May. When I stopped by they were just completing the final part of phase 2 – planting 380 trees to help define the new fairways. 2,000 whips were also to be planted between the larger trees and 1,000 beech whips where to be put in the beech hedging where it had been damaged by rabbits.

With only a few weeks to complete the task, Hamish and his team of four (three of whom are qualified) were very busy. But they were doing it properly, stressed Hamish, the head greenkeeper there for the past six years. All the holes had been dug down to a good depth and the subsoil broken up. Mushroom compost, which had been ordered in the summer and left to rot, was put in the holes along with some tree and shrub fertiliser "to make sure they've got a good start".

Trying to meet their end of November deadline, the Broomieknowe staff could only



Pictures: bottom left, Stephen Sinclair by Craigmillar Park's main feature – the wall that runs through the middle of the course.

This page: Hamish Brough by the 4th green at Broomieknowe. The old barn in the background is where he keeps his fertiliser and ChemSafe.

do the basics on the course. There were a lot of leaves lying around and annoying the golfers but this, I was told, had nothing to do with the tree work. Their five-year-old Amazone Groundkeeper was being repaired.

Once the trees had been planted, the next job was to plant some Astroturf. Hamish had bought 400 sq yd of it and planned to put strips of the former five-a-side pitches down to make paths near the 1st and 5th tees. "We went down to Portobello to lift 100 sq yards of artificial turf. They were selling it for £1.50 sq yd but they were keen to get rid of it so we ended up getting 400 sq yd for the price of 100 sq yd," explains Hamish, who started as an apprentice at Gullane in 1979 and has also worked as head greenkeeper at Mortonhall near Edinburgh and at a course in Australia for a year.

Other winter work involves releveling or taking tiers out of several tees. They will use a turf-cutter and rotorvator on the back of a tractor for this before seeding them. "The tools that we have now make jobs like releveling a tee very simple. We can relevel a 500 sq yd tee in a week," he said matter-of-factly.

This is all in addition to the normal winter aeration work on fairways and greens.

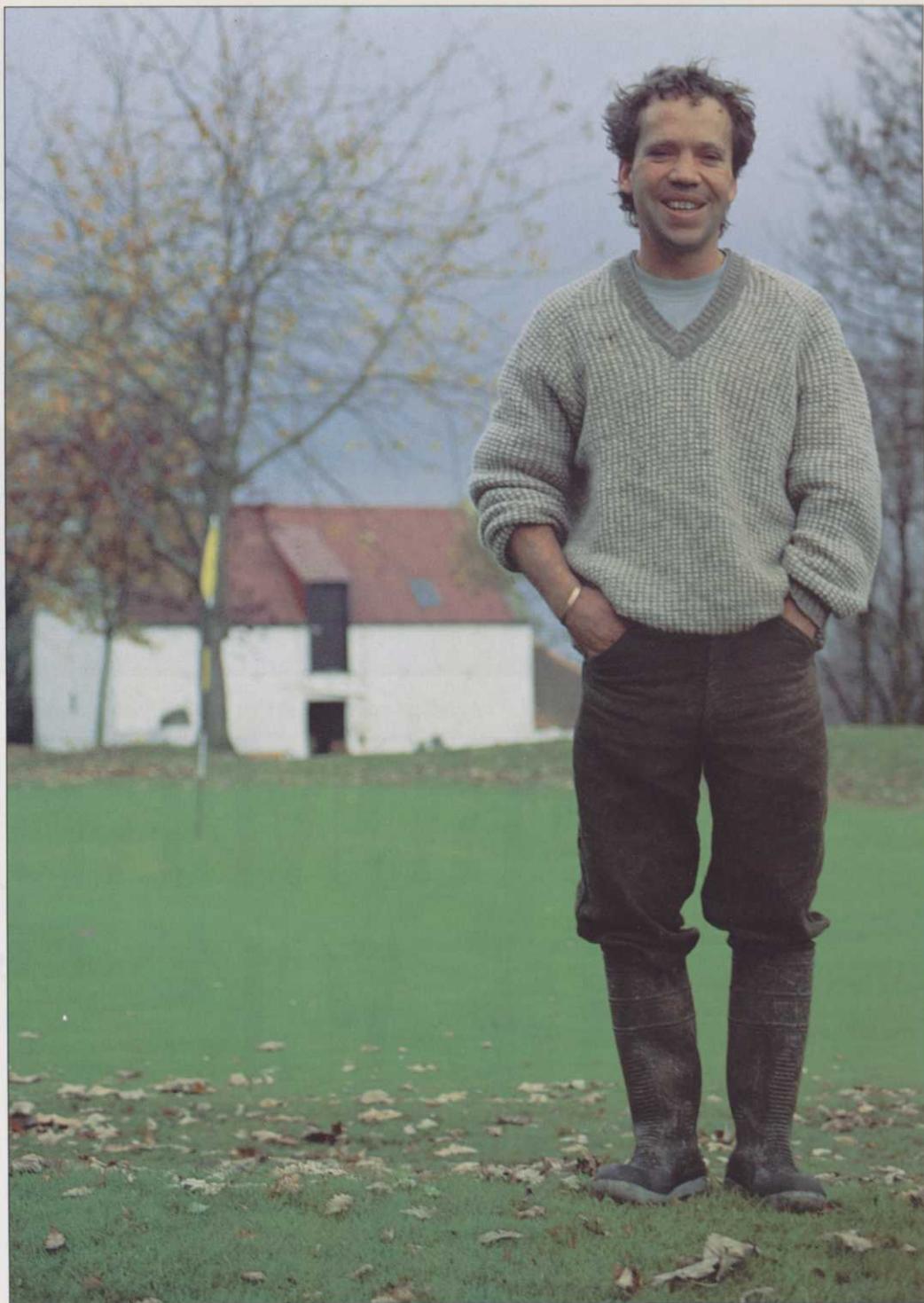
"If there's time after all this we'll build a tee on the 15th."

But what, I asked, will you do if it's really wet?

"Bash on."

Craigmillar Park

Craigmillar Park, which is only a couple of miles from the city centre, is one of several clubs in the area preparing for its centenary. This means head greenkeeper Stephen Sinclair and is three-man



team will have a relatively quiet winter.

They will mainly be tidying up and doing aeration work.

Stephen, 24, a former Toro/PGA European Tour Student Greenkeeper of the Year finalist, has been at the course since he left school in '86 and was made head greenkeeper last year. He would like to remodel a large bunker on a par 3 because it hides the green and encourages golfers to hit big into nearby property. But the club don't want any major changes before next year's centenary celebrations.

Instead the biggest job they've got to do is returning four tees. "They're really uneven," says Stephen. They also plan to pea-gravel some pathways and to

improve the clubhouse area. "We've got to try to make it more pleasing to the eye," he says.

The biggest problem he has to contend with, he believes, is thatch on the greens. "The greens were overfed and overwatered, kept green and lush for the members in the past. We've got them round to our way of thinking now – firm and fast greens. We've done a lot of topdressing since I took over. I try to do it every month during the summer."

They also use an intensive aeration programme, including Verti-draining last year, hollow-coring twice a year, slitting the predominantly *Poa* greens weekly and the tees fortnightly all winter. When I called in on them in November they were still cutting

the greens three times a week with a raised head ("just to keep them rolled"). Tees are cut every couple of weeks and the fairways left. "The growth is unbelievable, we're cutting fairways first week in March."

Later that month he would like to hollow-core the greens but he can't spoil the putting surface.

"The problem is we've got a high-ranking amateur tournament the first week in April – the Craigmillar Park Open with Walker Cup points available."

All this talk of golf made me want to get out and drive some balls into the wind. But there was no time for that, it was time to return to ScotsTurf and let these greenkeepers get on with their work...