

## No 1: George Brown

**Age:** 55

**Appearance:** Cuddly comedian, like Terry Scott.

**Not the late Labour MP then?** No, this George Brown is course manager at Turnberry.

**What's a course manager?** It's like a greenkeeper only you tell someone else to cut the grass, you sit in on meetings with bigwigs from the R&A and BBC, and you're allowed in the clubhouse.

**So why's he in the news?** The Open Championship is at Turnberry July 14-17.

**Is it an important event?** It's the Wimbledon of golf but, more importantly, it can break a greenkeeper. One bad word from Peter Alliss and his life can be shattered. Tom O'Brien, head greenkeeper at Royal Birkdale, never recovered from criticism of his course during the '91 Open. It devastated him, then they dug up the greens and found no-one could have grown grass on the plasticine-like soil below the turf.

**How's George's course looking?** Great, but someone will soon find something to complain about, especially if things aren't going well for them. Last time the Open was at Turnberry, in 1986, the pros said the fairways were too narrow and the rough too rough!

**Isn't it supposed to be rough?** Yes, but the pros don't like looking stupid on TV. If they're in the rough they still like to be able to reach the green, not chip out sideways with a sandwedge.

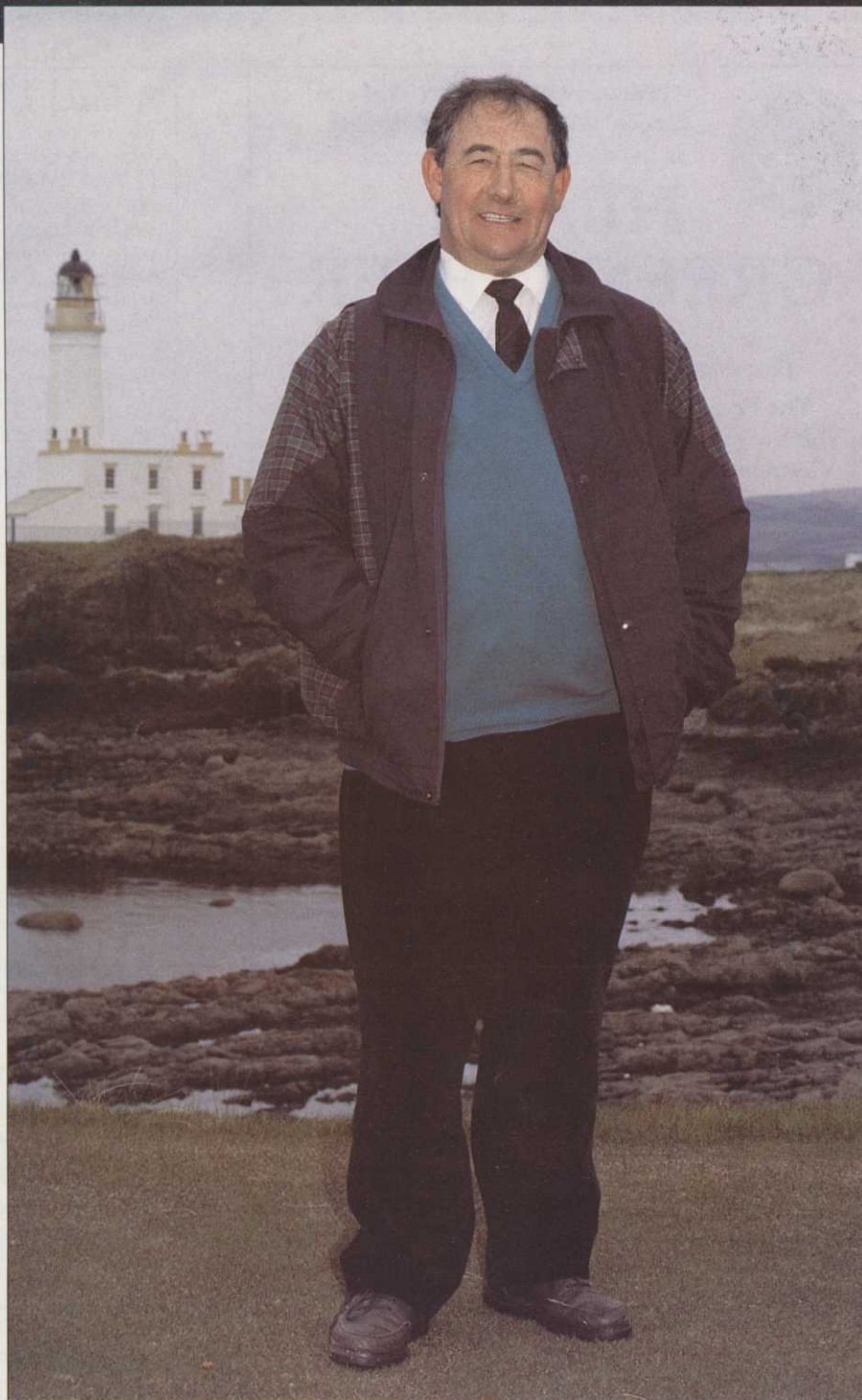
**The course was too tough for them?** The winning total was level par 280.

**What's that mean?** The winner had as many birdies as bogeys.

**Oh!** It also means Greg Norman's '86 winning score was way behind Tom Watson's winning total at Turnberry in '77 – 268.

**Was the course easier in '77?** It was for Watson and runner-up Jack Nicklaus – everyone else was closer to Norman's score that year. Hubert Green, who came third on 279, said: "I won the tournament I played in". No, the course was pretty much the same, the difference was the weather. In '77 it was hot and dry with little wind, in '86 it was blowing a hooley. If there's no wind, it's a relatively easy course for top players. George Brown reckons some pros could shoot 59, but 63s and 64s are definitely on the cards. If the wind blows, however, it's easier to get 75s and 76s, and breaking 80 can be hard. That's the beauty of a links course.

**A what course?** A links course – near the sea, built on sandy soil, lots of mounds and bumpy fairways. No trees, only gorse bushes and wild flowers. Small, strategically-placed bunkers.



**It doesn't sound like that pretty course I saw on TV recently?** That was probably Augusta National in America. No, it's nothing like that. George Brown likes it when his fairways are brown. His Japanese bosses don't, but he says they're learning that links courses are different, that green is not necessarily beautiful.

**But does he know what he's talking about?** He's one of the most respected greenkeepers in the country. He's been doing it for 40 years, in fact since he was 15. And he's been at Turnberry since January 1986.

**Do you have to know about golf to manage a course?** No, but it helps. George was once the head greenkeeper and pro at the same nine-hole course in Hampshire. He plays off four now.

**What's that mean?** He's allowed four bogeys.

**And is that good?** Pretty good, but the idea is not to have any bogeys because it messes up the card.

**Not to be confused with:** George Brown, the late MP; George Brown, the author; Charlie Brown; Walter Woods; Jimmy Kidd; Jim Arthur.

**Least likely to say:** "Peter Alliss, you don't know what you're talking about."

**Even less likely to say:** "Let's plant some rhododendrons."

**Most likely to say:** "Augusta is like a blow-up doll – not as good as the real thing."

*(With apologies to The Guardian's excellent Pass Notes)*