

## ADRIAN SIMM



Former Myerscough College student Adrian Simm assisted on about eight golf courses in the north of England before becoming a Maxwell Hart rep. One day he went for an interview in Belgium. He didn't get the job but when that firm bought a golf course in Holland he was offered the chance to show them what he could do. He started at the 27-hole Golfclub de Purmer championship course, about 40km north of Amsterdam, in June 1990 and stayed there until January this year when he moved 30km to Amsterdamse Golf Club. This is an 18-hole parkland course built on polder (reclaimed land). It has 750 members and has been open six years. He came in as course manager over the head greenkeeper which has caused problems but not as many as you might think.

Following a recent remark by BIGGA president Viscount Whitelaw that in years to come it may be difficult to keep the top greenkeepers in this country, Chris Boiling went to Holland to see what it's like for three Brits working abroad.

## BILL GARNER

Bill Garner hasn't worked in the UK for ten years. After 16 years at Wilmslow (six as head greenkeeper), he became course manager at The Grange in Dublin. Then he saw a job advertised and in March 1988 became course manager at Hilversumsche, Holland's fourth oldest course.

When I met him, Bill and his staff were busy preparing the 18-hole wooded heathland course for the Dutch Open. He says his aim is to "make it the best course in Holland." He has no plans to return home yet: "The longer it goes on the harder it is to go back."



# Holland

## Where the grass is greener

**T**he grass is greener for greenkeepers on the other side of the North Sea. After a quick tour of three Dutch clubs maintained by Brits, it's easy to come to the conclusion that:

- Their maintenance facilities rank alongside the best clubs in Britain;
- Their machinery inventory would be the envy of most British greenkeepers; and
- They are treated better. They are treated as professionals by

their employers and by club members, and are paid accordingly.

BIGGA's former education chairman, Huw Parry, the former course manager at Bristol and Clifton who accompanied me on the lightning tour of The Netherlands, agrees: "Their facilities are certainly much better. They seem to be regarded more – especially the expats – as professional people. They certainly have a way of life that is far better than in the

UK, but they seem to be under less pressure at the same time. The standards are different so the pressures are different. The standards in the UK are much greater, generally. I think they've got a much better working environment. They seem to have the machinery to do the job, they seem to have the money to spend on fertiliser, seeds and top dressings.

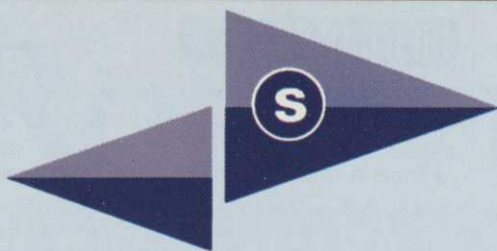
"I think at the end of the day as long as they're producing a good

product then the money is there for them, whereas back home many greenkeepers are fighting for everything they can get."

### Budgets

At the 5859m par 72 Hilversumsche Golf Club Bill Garner says he has a budget but he gets what he wants. "The course comes first here. If I need a machine then it's planned." He even has his own Hydroject 3000 and two Verti-drains. He spends





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## COLIN FAIRLEY



Colin Fairley – pictured centre with his team – joined Vereniging Golfclub Almeerderhout six and a half years ago and helped with its extension in 1990. The club now has three loops of nine holes, a nine-hole par 3 course and driving range. Although it is situated below sea level on land won back from the ocean, the forest has a very natural look. With several water hazards and an extensive tree-planting scheme they are “working towards parkland”.

Colin, 36, was recommended for the job by the pro whom he had met while greenkeeping in Edinburgh. Colin started as an apprentice at Harburn and worked his way up to first assistant before becoming head greenkeeper at Uphall, where he stayed for six years.

about £80,000 on grass seed, sand and fertiliser.

Colin Fairley says he now spends more on servicing his machinery than he had in his budget at his previous clubs. “It’s a new club run by company managers who realise you get what you pay for,” he adds.

Adrian Simm says at his first club “machinery and money were no object”. He says he had £1m worth of machinery and spent £120,000 a year on grass seed and fertiliser (although you have to bear in mind tax is paid on seed and fertiliser).

### Size of team

Bill Garner has seven staff to maintain his 18-hole course. Colin Fairley has a staff of nine looking after 27 holes and par 3 course.

We were shocked when Adrian Simm said the greenkeeping staff at Amsterdamse comprised three greenkeepers and the course manager. Then we found out their only responsibility is the 18 greens, aprons, bunkers, tees and the tee bankings. Everything else is contracted out. The contractor has about 50 employees and looks after several courses and

parks. They cut the fairways, semi rough and rough and carry out other tasks such as verti-draining and overseeding. “It takes a lot of pressure off me,” says Adrian.

Bill adds: “The staff have been good to me. There were some difficulties in the beginning but you could get that going to Scotland.”

### Greens committee

Hilversumsche has a greens committee of three who stay for five years. Bill Garner has had the same greens chairman for six years and, he says, “he backs me all the way when it comes to machines.”

Colin works with five other people on his committee, each has his own function. They meet every six to eight weeks.

Amsterdamse has a greens committee of one whom Adrian sees for ten minutes every Monday morning with the general manager.

### Life abroad

The course managers we met had a higher standard of living than many of their UK counterparts and their money was far superior, although it’s an expensive place to live. Health insurance is partic-



# Where the grass is greener

## AMSTERDAMSE



ularly expensive. They also have to pay 50 per cent tax on everything earned over £17,000.

"Compared with Scotland, the standard of living is far higher, otherwise I wouldn't be here," says Colin Fairley.

Adrian Simm says he earns £38-40,000. With holiday pay (equivalent to a month's money) and a Christmas bonus (another month's money) he gets 14 months pay a year. He also gets a travel allowance and his phone bill paid. He works nine hours a day in the summer (7am-5pm) and seven hours in the winter. "The standard of living is much better," he says, "We seem to be able to afford more."

### The language

If the signs on the courses are anything to go by, there should be no language problems. The 'ground under repair' and 'next tee' signs were all in English.

Bill speaks Dutch, Adrian doesn't but he says all of his staff speak English. Colin speaks a little Dutch but says half his staff are British anyhow – "there's a shortage of qualified staff in The Netherlands," he says, so he has employed several Brits.

Casper Paulussen, Colin's Dutch deputy, says: "Most Dutch people speak English so there is no problem with language."

### Family life

Living abroad is easier for the greenkeeper because he's doing a job he enjoys. The key to success is how the wife and children adapt. "I think if my wife wasn't happy we'd go back, but she is happy. She's made some nice friends – Dutch and English," says Bill Garner who is married with three children – girls aged seven and four and a boy who is nearly two. He says his family have adapted well to life abroad. His children – two of whom were born in Holland – all speak "perfect" English and Dutch.

Adrian is also married with three children (aged eight, five and three) who are learning to speak Dutch.

Colin has a 15-year-old son who speaks fluent Dutch and a 14-month-old girl. His wife works in Amsterdam for Greenpeace, an international organisation that operates in English. "I think working abroad is more attractive to single people or couples with young families. The Dutch seem

to keep themselves to themselves," he told me.

### Greenkeeping differences

The greenkeeping practices and problems in Holland are fairly similar to the UK. But, generally, they're a few years behind.

The weather is similar to the Midlands but probably more extreme in the winter and hotter in the summer.

Holland is a 'greener' country than the UK so there are more regulations concerning pesticides, the use of nitrogen and how much water can be used.

Adrian says the maintenance practices are very similar but "we've got more money to play with and full control of the budget."

### Recommend it?

"It's a confidence booster – to be able to learn the language, drive on the wrong side of the road. When you can survive abroad you think 'Yeah, that's good'," says Bill.

Colin says: "Yes, but you need commitment."

● *This trip was sponsored by Barenbrug, which provides the seeds for the three courses.*

In 1990 the 60-year-old Amsterdamse Golf Club was forced to move to a new site when a new railway was built on nine holes. The remaining nine holes became the Amsterdam Old Course and a new course – with penncross and pure sand greens – was built in Halfweg. A year and a half after being built they were condemned by club members, the STRI's Jeff Perris and Walter Woods, St Andrews' links superintendent. They agreed the greens would never meet the required standard. The main cause was the very high pH level, a sandbed where the depth ranged from 20-60cm and the almost missing upper humusbed.

A decision was made to start again – at a cost of £100,000. "But we had no choice," said club member and golf course architect Gerard Jol, who was commissioned to redesign the greens and direct the project.

His starting point with the new greens was more pin positions. He also made them smaller (from an average of 690m<sup>2</sup> to 550m<sup>2</sup>), "more interesting and harmonised them with their surroundings. They also took the opportunity to add some bunkers around the greens and on two fairways to make "two rather dull holes more challenging."

The new greens were sewn with ordinary fescue, fescue with fine offshoots and ordinary bentgrass.

The work started in August 1992 and was finished two months later. Because the fairways were already sewn with fescue and bent grasses, good temporary greens were constructed on the fairway, so disruption to members was kept to a minimum while the new greens were built and grown-in.

The greens were open for play at the beginning of September 1993 with the mowing height kept to 8mm. In October, two years after the greens were condemned and one year after the reconstruction started, the Netherland Golf Federation gave the club the 'A-status' it desired.