



To the Manor born

This feature comes to you in
association with

TORO

professional turf maintenance
equipment

Celtic Manor Golf and Country Club is the result of one man's dream, a dream which will give pleasure to thousands and provide Wales with a truly great Championship venue.

Written by Scott MacCallum Photographs by Phil Inglis and Jeff Morgan



'It is a quality development of truly international standard'

Crossing the Severn Bridge into Wales at the moment it is difficult not to marvel at the magnificent structure currently under construction a mile or so to your left. The new, as yet unnamed, bridge, complete but for a few gaps in the span and with huge cranes somehow floating in the water around it, gives a reminder of man's ability to create technological masterpieces.

Travel a few miles further down the M4 and again your breath is taken away by another extraordinary feat.

Like the new bridge Celtic Manor Golf and Country Club is a showcase for man's talents as well as being a tribute to the achievements of one particular human being. We've all heard tales of the local man made good but the story of Terry Matthews puts most others in the shade and is sufficiently awe inspiring to make all but Richard Branson feel an underachiever. He began his professional life repairing telephone kiosks and has risen to become the tenth richest man in Great Britain. He no longer resides in Wales however. He moved to Canada some time ago and his £500 million personal fortune – that's £500,000,000, a five and eight zeros – was amassed from the telecommunications business, Newbridge Network, he founded.



Riding high: Course Manager Jim McKenzie

Terry was born in the building which is now the Celtic Manor Hotel when it was a maternity hospital. He bought it some years ago and turned it into a hotel before his

dream of creating a golf course fit to host a top PGA European Tour event for a Welsh title developed fully.

It's a dream which is nearing fruition and one which has cost in excess of £50 million.

It sounds, and is, a lot of money but when you visit Celtic Manor and see the sheer scale of the development, 36 holes plus the Ian Woosnam Golf Academy, and the blind devotion to excellence it is easy to see where the money has gone and even, it may sound ludicrous to say, conclude that he's got a bit of a bargain.

Designed by Robert Trent Jones Snr, who would have a strong case for being the man at the very pinnacle of the profession, the Roman Road course at 7001 yards par 70 is not something you'd want to play to in the Monthly Medal while the Coldra Woods course 4094 yards par 61 will help to develop new talent – Celtic Manor is also the new home of the Welsh Golf Union. Coldra Woods is a selection of par-3s and par-4s with the added bonus of making it a pure par-3 course by moving to the front tees which have been built on the par-4s.

Testing every club in the bag the Roman Road will be a particular examination for the putter as Trent Jones Snr has installed his trademark greens with subtle and some not so subtle borrows. One thing it doesn't do is comply with conventional wisdom when it

This feature comes to you in association with **TORO** professional turf maintenance equipment



Celtic Manor's head mechanic Cal Callaby, left, in the well-equipped workshop with Julian Driver, sales manager of Pro-Turf Equipment, Carmarthen

comes to considering Roman Roads. Long it may be but dead straight and flat it isn't. High on a hill overlooking some majestic Welsh countryside it will require shot making of the highest quality to make a score and when the wind blows as it undoubtedly will even Touring Pro Ian Woosnam will be hard pushed to tame it from the back tees.

It also carries the flag of the Wales Tourist Board which is hoping that it will attract top sportsmen and women as well as accompanying tourist influx from all over Britain and the rest of Europe.

"It is a quality development of truly international standard and ideally placed, just off the M4, to attract visitors from the rest of Wales and across the border," said Shan Ekin-Wood, Wales Tourist Board Press Officer.

"With Ian Woosnam's involvement and with proposed equestrian and tennis centres it should attract top quality sportsmen and women to Wales. It will be an important part of the Welsh tourist industry," she added.

Course Manager, Jim McKenzie, is the man who has been charged with bringing the courses to peak condition.

"We've actually kept very quiet about Celtic Manor before we opened. Our marketing people have been very clever in that they have not given the course a huge build up as has happened at some others. The idea was

to finish it and then let people make up their own mind about it. Then they could be the ones to sing our praises," explained Jim.

A 33 year-old Scot with an impeccable greenkeeping pedigree having worked at some of the country's finest courses, Jim has been on site since June '93 slowly bringing it along so its condition will match the quality of the lay-out.

"I've had the benefit of being involved from very early on so I've had input on a great deal of the construction work.

"Trent Jones Snr drew up the construction specifications, Wenvoe Construction of Cardiff moved the top soil, Trent Jones' own shapers shaped the course, the top soil was replaced, Gerald Davis did the final seeding and the irrigation was put in by Toro," he explained.

Jim's own team did all the final shaping, all the drainage and sanding of the bunkers and this not only had cost cutting benefits but also enabled the job to be done at the optimum time.

"By doing this ourselves it meant that we could structure the jobs much better. If it was

too wet for my guys to put in sand they'd go and do something else. If a contractor came he'd do it anyway."

The course has been built to be extremely maintenance friendly and capable of fending off all but the worst the South Welsh elements could throw at it.

"It really is a facility to play golf every day of the year. It's built on the apex of a hill so drainage is not a problem and there is little or no frost because of the wind. There is very little time consuming strimmer work involved and it's all ride-on Toro mowers on the banks so it's quick to do."

At the moment there are 35 people working on the course with 20 full time permanent staff. Once open, and the official opening will take place at the beginning of this month, there will be a full time staff of 25 to 26 working under Jim including two mechanics and two gardeners.

There are two Head Greenkeepers. Russell Anderson, formerly with Jim at Wentworth, is Deputy Course Manager and in charge of the Roman Road while Paul Davies, who previously worked at St Pierre is Assistant Deputy Course Manager and in charge of Coldra Woods.

Byron Thomas, runner-up in the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year, is also a member of the Celtic Manor staff.

"Once both courses are open I'll pick out people with strengths in particular areas to work on the course where that skill is important. The ability to handle a machine on a slope will be a skill required on the Coldra Woods course for example," explained Jim who in addition to his last position at Wentworth has had experience at Hagg's Castle, Cawder and Renfrew, a course he rates as one of the best inland courses he has ever seen.

The maintenance sheds at Celtic Manor are among the best anywhere and at a cost of around £333,333 they should be.

"The design came from a collaboration with Robert Trent Jones, a local architect and myself.

"There is a drive in area to the Chemical Store so there is little danger of spillage and the Mess Room is designated a clean area so dirty boots and jackets are banned. The floors are tiled and the tables and chairs can be

folded away and stacked so it can be hosed down. The office is by the main gate so I can see who's coming and going while we have a skip permanently on site so you won't see any litter anywhere.

"We have low level lighting so mechanics don't need spotlights to see what they're doing."

CELTIC MANOR FACTS

■ The total number of hours on ride-on grass cutters currently stands at 2,672.

■ The estimated time on the Roman Road course spent pedestrian mowing since April 1 is 1,568 hours.

This feature comes to you in association with **TORO** professional turf maintenance equipment



Jim rates Chief Mechanic, Patrick Callaby, as the best in the country and is delighted that he was able to persuade him away from St Pierre.

"The maintenance area was available in April '94 and I didn't touch it or buy anything until Patrick arrived and he lived in his workshop for two weeks before he bought anything just to make sure he had the feel of it. It took seven of us to unload his specially designed £1,000 workbench when it arrived.

"People might read this and think it's alright for them they've got the money to do it but I'm sure if they were in the same position they'd try to do the same," explained Jim, whose February wedding to Tracy, the Sales Manager, was celebrated at a reception in the sumptuous hotel.

Celtic Manor is probably unique in that it concentrates on one main company for all its greenkeeping equipment and another for

the heavier work with the club owning 34 pieces of Toro equipment and six Massey Ferguson tractors.

"I went for Toro equipment because Lely, Toro's UK distributor offered me the best overall deal and the benefit in going for one brand is quite considerable when it comes to spare parts and in the general maintenance and servicing of the machinery.

"It was not a decision taken purely on financial grounds, quality of service was extremely important as well. To give you an example our local Toro dealer is Pro Turf in Carmarthen 70 miles a way but I phoned an order in for three items about £10 each and someone made the 140 mile round trip to deliver them to me that day. That is them coming across with their side of the bargain."

For Jim it is a superb job but also a huge challenge and one which swallows up his time.

"I used to look at the Greenkeeper of the Year Award and think it was wrong because instead of going to the likes of David Whitaker at Wisley with all the money he could possibly want it should go to the one man and a boy working on a course at the top of a hill. I've changed my thinking and now believe that the more money you've got the more pressure there is and the greater the expectations.

"The entire staff have been working seven to seven, seven days a week for the last five weeks and there was a time last year just after we'd seeded that we clocked up 103 hours in the one week. We'd arrive in the dark and go home in the dark.

"At the moment (just before opening) we're not under the same obligation to do things when they should be done. For example the tees need cutting today and if we were open we would be doing them but the boys are doing something else and we'll cut the tees tomorrow.

"You just throw the rule book right out the window.

"You always try to strive for perfection and ideally I would like it to open next year because then it would be better and all the non grassed areas would be grassed," he said.

It's that attitude and general attention to detail which will ensure that when the course and clubhouse opens fully Celtic Manor will quickly establish itself as one of the premier golf and hotel resorts in Europe. It also virtually guarantees that the dream that has driven Terry Matthews will make that all too rare metamorphosis and become reality.

Toro Equipment

- Five Greens Master 3000 D Mowers
- Five Reel Master 216 D Tees Mowers
- Two Reel Master 5100 D Fairway Mowers
- One Reel Master 5300 D Fairway Mower
- One Grounds Master 325 D Rotary Mower
- Two Grounds Master 455 D Rotary Mowers
- Two Workman 3300 D Utility Vehicles
- One Sand Pro Bunker Rake
- One Toro Top Dresser
- Ten GR 1000 Pedestrian Greens Mowers

Rest of Equipment

- Four Ransomes Marquis
- One Hardi 600 ltr sprayer
- One Vico fertiliser spreader
- Three Massey Ferguson 362 Tractors
- One Massey Ferguson 240 Tractor
- One Massey Ferguson 1250 Tractor with front and rear loader
- One Massey Ferguson 1230 with front and rear loader
- Three Massey Ferguson trailers
- Ten Club Car Carryall utility vehicles

This feature comes to you in association with **TORO** professional turf maintenance equipment