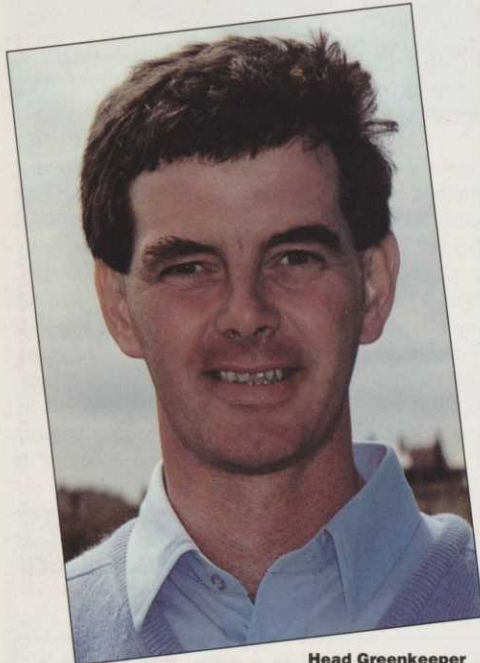




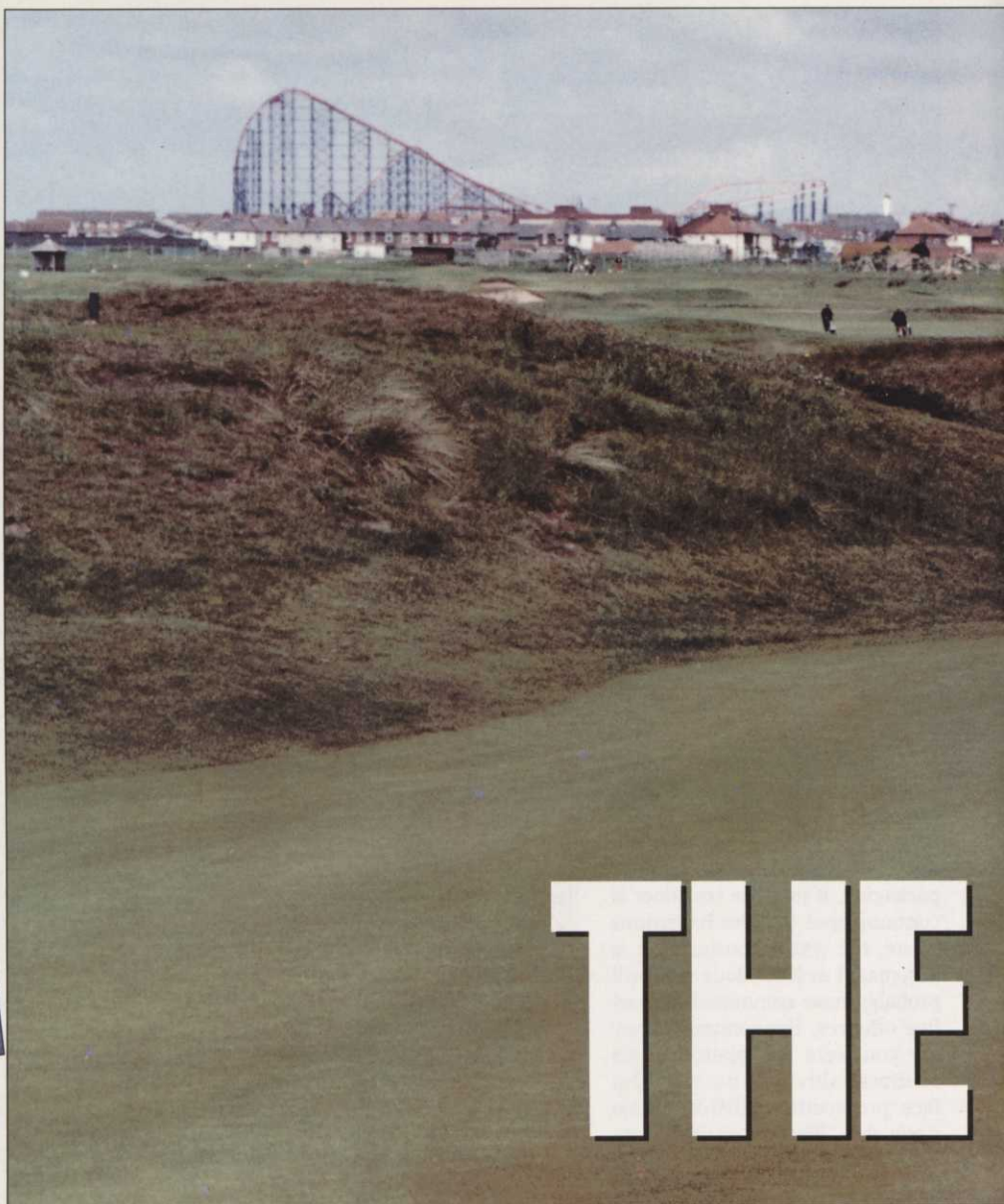
Miracle
Amenity Care

NATIONAL TOURNAMENT

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**Head Greenkeeper
Geoff Whittle and
his course –
complete with
famous landmarks
on the horizon**



THE

St Annes Old Links is a test worthy of the National Tournament while the area's other attractions can also set the pulse racing, reports Scott MacCallum

The highlight of the golfing year is virtually upon us with the 1995 National Tournament and St Annes Old Links bracing itself for the arrival a host of golfing greenkeepers each possessing a swing honed to perfection. For months now rakes have doubled as 4-irons as grown men up and down the country pause from their work to create what they hope will be their glorious approach to the tough closing hole at St Annes setting up the birdie which would see them enter the history books as the 1995 Champion.

The National Tournament, major sponsor Miracle Amenity Care (formerly ICI/Zeneca Professional Products), is truly The Big One for golfing greenkeepers, but on this occasion the whole family can experience the thrills and spills of The Big One. For dominating the St Annes horizon, some three miles away on Blackpool Pleasure Beach is the world's tallest

roller coaster, appropriately known as The Big One, so while great golfing achievements are being performed on the Links equally memorable daring deeds can be chalked up by the rest of the family.

The golfers will need no such distraction as St Annes Old Links is a superb golf course in every sense of the word and a great credit to its Head Greenkeeper, Geoff Whittle, and his team of five.

Geoff, who comes from one of the game's great golfing dynasties – his elder brother Chris is Head Greenkeeper at Royal Birkdale having previously been at Muirfield, while his cousin Derek Posselthwaite is head man at Formby.

"I started as an apprentice at Royal Birkdale and finished my apprenticeship at Formby. From there I went to Royal Lytham where I worked under Jimmy McDonald and was Course Manager at Northenden before arriving at St Annes," explained Geoff.

"I always wanted to come back to a links course as that is where I learned my craft and I enjoy the links style of greenkeeping. The fundamental difference is that on a links

course the main aim is to keep the grass alive while on a parkland course it is to keep it cut."

St Annes Old Links was founded in 1901 although golf will have been played over the land for well over 100 years.

Every hole has character and the course impressed no less a golfing legend than Bobby Jones who played the course during the 1926 Open. Apparently he was so taken with the 9th that he took detailed measurements in order to reproduce a hole of similar style in the States.

As with every course in the country there are particular areas which cause the green-keeping staff concerns. At St Annes it is the fact that it is laid out over an extremely tight piece of land which leads to a lot of wear and tear problems with the traffic confined to the same routes to and from tees and greens. "On occasions we have played the course in reverse which is fun and gives us a chance to route the traffic in a different way."

Another problem which has been afflicting the course this year has been rabbits, but Geoff believes they have now got on top of them.



BIG ONE

Illuminating: nearby Blackpool at night

Picture: Blackpool Tourism Services Department

"It's been a real epidemic this season but we put up a fence around three sides of the course as part of our winter programme and that seems to have stopped them. The fence is two feet under the ground and two feet above the ground.

"There is a nature reserve over the railway line and I think they kept sneaking onto the course from there."

This year Geoff and his team of Deputy Bob Bould, First Assistant Dean Briers, assistants Andrew MacDonald and Paul Cushing and apprentice Richard Draper have encountered the same weather problems as everyone else – a very wet winter coupled with the long dry spell.

"I'm glad I didn't drop the cutters during the brief spell of good weather in May when some of the members, having seen it at other courses, wanted it done because I knew from experience that summer hadn't arrived and sure enough we had frost a little while later."

It is a windy course, a par 72 6616 yard test, with the prevailing wind coming from the west, or across the course from left to right, so

the advice is to hone your draw to hold it into the breeze.

"There are not many holes down wind at all, perhaps only two. My particular favourite is the 16th, a short par-3 which I think is a little like the Postage Stamp at Royal Troon. The signature hole is, of course, the 9th, another par-3, with a 56 yard long green which can mean the difference of about four clubs," said Geoff.

The toughest hole is probably the 7th which at 447 yards into the prevailing wind tests even the longest of hitters if they are to board the green in regulation.

One excellent idea which St Annes has is not what it quite seems – a 19th hole.

"It's not the conventional 19th hole but a genuine extra hole measuring around 140 yards which allows us to work on one of the other holes and not inconvenience the golfers. In its normal guise the 19th is the chipping green, but in the winter it is in constant use as substitute to one of the regular 18.

"It really is a great idea and I think every club should think about having one if it's got





the room," said Geoff.

Care is taken to ensure that playing conditions at St Annes Old Links are as good as they can possibly be. The bunker sand comes from the beach but it's not quite as cost effective a measure as you might think. "The sand goes off to get cleaned and then we buy it back," explained Geoff.

The course is regularly used as an Open Qualifying venue when The Open is at Royal Lytham so Geoff will be preparing it for that role next year but in the mean time it is the National Championship – The Big One – which is exercising his mind.

"Having 70 or 80 of your peers

looking over your course is quite a thought but in many ways I'm looking forward to them coming to see it."

One thing though, Geoff will not be putting his local knowledge to good use as he will not be playing in the event. "There will be too much to do and I don't play much in any case," he explained.

The entire week is geared up to be a hit with everyone who attends with a prize table fit to make eyes water and ensure that no shots are dropped carelessly.

"I attended last year's tournament and saw how excellent it was but I am confident we can out do it this year," said Clive

Heginbotham, Miracle Amenity Care Northern Regional Manager. "It is a superb course and what's more with attractions like The Big One an ideal location for the rest of the family as well," he added.

Equipment at St Annes

Ransomes Greens Plex
 Jacobsen Greens Machine
 Ransomes 180 Triplex
 Saxon Triplex
 Toro 70 Triplex
 Kubota 3250 Tractor with front loader
 Two Ford 335 Tractors
 John Deere 755 Compact Tractor
 Hand machines

Timetable of events

Sunday July 30: Registration.

Monday July 31: The Fison's Bowl – 18 hole medal.

Evening: Miracle Amenity Care Evening – Lancashire theme open to all the family with Lancashire buffet (hotpot, black pudding and scouse) and a Lancashire folk group

Tuesday August 1: Standard Golf Trophy – 18 hole medal. 36 hole prize – 0-14 handicap – David Royle Cup, 15-28 handicap – Patisson Trophy. Best Gross 36 hole score – Toro Trophy. The Vitax Putting Cup – 18 hole putting competition.

Evening: Tournament Dinner with speaker Bill Beaumont.

Wednesday August 2: William Hargreaves Trophy (Sisis) – 18 hole medal. 54 hole best Gross Hardi Amenity Sprayers' Trophy. 54 hole best Nett Miracle Amenity Care Trophy. Afternoon: Prize giving and departure (around 5-6pm)

■ Anyone seeking further information regarding the event should contact Bert Cross on 0151 724 5412.

Accommodation information can be obtained from Samantha Flint at BIGGA Headquarters on 01347 838581.

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