

IRRIGATION SYSTEM'S Toughest test

In March 1994 we reported on Head Greenkeeper Alistair Cale's route to installing a new irrigation system. How did he and Ifield GC cope with this summer's drought conditions?

This year's severe drought has tested irrigation systems at every club in the country to the full and, coupled with the general lack of water, has seen many greenkeepers faced with severe problems in preventing their courses from burning up.

With that in mind we returned to Ifield GC, where in March of

last year we published an article with Head Greenkeeper Alastair Cale on the installation of a new irrigation system, to find out how they had coped with the harshest of examinations.

"I said in the article at the time that only time would tell if I'd made the right decision," said Head Greenkeeper Alastair Cale, who had purchased a Heron (also known as HHI Electronics) controller with Hunter pop-ups installed by local Sussex company Flanderblade.

"All I can say is that I'm absolutely delighted with the irrigation system we have," said 31

year-old Alastair.

"Over the summer I heard some horror stories from some clubs which had far more expensive systems than ours but we didn't have any problems."

"I know that I took a gamble going with Heron because I didn't know them but I visited the factory and got references from others who had a system – mainly horticultural people – and went with them. The object was to get value for money and I feel that we achieved that while at the same time not losing out on efficiency."

The system was installed in the

winter of last year and the weather did cause a few problems.

"The cable laying took place in late February and March but the pipe laying around the greens didn't begin until early April and it was held up because it still hadn't stopped raining," recalled Alastair.

The original article explained how Alastair had gone about preparing a report for his committee outlining what could be achieved by way of a new irrigation system on a limited budget.

"To compile the report we got a couple of the leading irrigation

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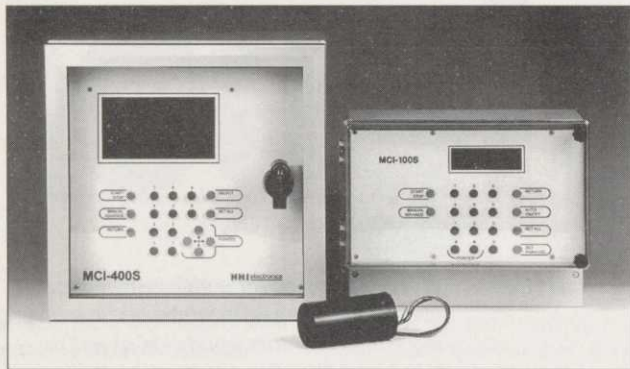
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Ifield also saved water and

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companies to come and give us their opinions of our watering system and to brief the committee members about irrigation systems in general. We also went down to Ham Manor (where Alistair had been an assistant) so I could show a committee member what we'd done and he talked to the secretary. I also asked a lot of greenkeepers I knew in the area who had parkland courses what sort of pop-ups they were using impact or gear driven. I got demonstrations of different types of pop-ups and over a period of about three months we began to

form the basis of a report." explained Alastair in the original piece.

The Heron MCI 100S controller, that was eventually agreed upon has been a roaring success.

"It has proved to be reliable, simple to use and very versatile – apart from a lightning strike in the first two months.

"David Carter from Heron came to replace the controller and they have since up-graded the lightning protection for all their controllers."

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cut down on their water charges by high spot watering

Alistair Cale in his 'pump room'



Alastair doesn't feel he has lost out.

"The only thing I would say is that the diagnostics are not quite as good as you would get on a more expensive model – but if they go wrong you still have to call out an electrician," he commented.

"The biggest problem you can get with a system is that the decoders are not reliable but I have not had a de-coder go down in all the time I have had the system.

He has also been impressed by the versatility of the de-coder.

"I can make a complete change in the order of pop-ups in a couple of minutes while I can water sections of the course in parallel and didn't need originally to wire up a zones on the course."

In the original piece Alastair described how they presented a 10 page report to the committee.

"It was decided we would do 12 greens this year, the remain-

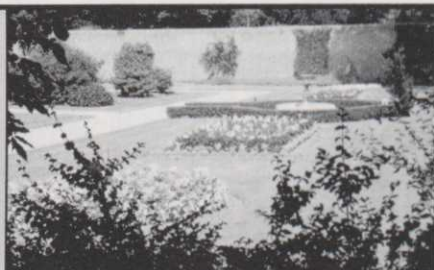
der and a few tees next year and the following year we'd finish off the tees and do the approaches. We'd do the cabling this year; we've already put our pump in so we've got the pressure and the flow rate to cope with the extra sprinklers on the greens."

"When we did the other six greens we changed the Hunter I 41s we had originally put on the greens and put them on the tees while we put I43s on the greens – the reason being that the I43s turn a lot faster.

The fact that the club got such

a good deal on its system allowed them to move further down their phased installation than they had originally hoped.

"We have already done all the greens, including the practice putting green, 12 tees, had a new controller, up-graded the pump-



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The 3rd hole at Ifield Golf and Country Club

ing system and re-wired the course for well under £30,000," explained Alastair.

Ifield also saved water and cut down on their water charges by high spot watering with a hose and with wetting agents.

"We used a spray to spot treat dry patch with non burning wet-

ting agent which was put on by a hand lance from our Cushman sprayer," said Alastair.

"We also verti drained the greens with half inch tines to a depth of three inches which left no surface damage or heave from the verti drain. This helped cut down the use of wetting agent.

We did this four times in the height of the drought."

The experiences at Ifield show that it is possible for all golf clubs, whether they be wealthy or not, can have an irrigation system which will do an excellent job and cope with the most searching of weather conditions.

The job I'm always glad to see the back of is...



"Divotting"

- Gerry Byrne, Luttrellstown Castle G&CC

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