

The wonderful Letham Grange Resort plays host to BIGGA's National Tournament in association with Scotts/Miracle in August. As Scott MacCallum found out it should proved to be a event not to be missed...

Home on the Grange



If there is one nasty habit of which sports writers are guilty - I can hear the incredulous cries of "Only One!" - it's labelling.

How often have we heard about "The Next George Best!" A young guy called Peter Marinello laboured under that burden with a spectacular lack of success for Arsenal in the '70s, while Ryan Giggs has come a little closer to living up to the billing... and at least plays for the same team. Isn't Ronaldo supposed to be "The New Pele"?

How many times have Wales come up with "The

New Barry John" or "The Next Gareth Edwards", or there is a middle order batsman who can bowl a bit and all of a sudden he sees his name in the papers as "The New Botham"?

In golf the list of players who have struggled to live up to being called "The New Nicklaus" or "The Golden Bear Cub?" is embarrassingly long - Johnny Miller and Ben Crenshaw at least won a few Majors but the likes of Hal Sutton and Scott Verplank, to put it mildly, didn't get very far in the chase to match Nicklaus' 18 Major Championships. At least

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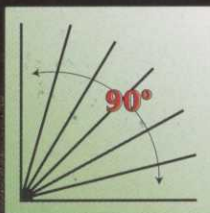
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they had the same colour of hair! However, another subject of journalistic "labelling" in the golf world hasn't suffered from the same damp squib fate as some of those mentioned and has, in fact, actually enjoyed its comparison with a more illustrious cousin.

About 12 years ago a former boss of mine, Malcolm Campbell, he was Editor of Golf Monthly - travelled to Angus with three times Open Champion, Henry Cotton, who had been invited to open a new golf course.

When he came to write about Letham Grange, near Arbroath, Malcolm labelled it "The Augusta of Scotland". Many people scoffed but Malcolm did speak with a level of authority. He'd visited hundreds of golf courses during his journalistic career, including Augusta National, and his opinion was one which was genuinely held.

Visiting Letham Grange, which this year plays host to BIGGA's National Tournament, in association with Scotts/Miracle, you will

be able to see how Malcolm came to that conclusion.

Sure, the real Augusta, in Georgia, offers so much that can't possibly be matched by this little corner of Scotland, but it would be a very unforgiving eye which could not see some similarities.

"I believe the spirit of the quotation was that Letham Grange felt like Augusta rather than that we were trying to duplicate it. It is designed as a tribute to Augusta," explained Resort Manager Gordon Kingsford-Smith.

Having said that there are individual holes which have a more than passing resemblance to their transatlantic relations. For example the 2nd is a short par three guarded by a lake which is an obvious close relation to the 16th which has seen so much drama at Augusta.

But is is not just Augusta from which Letham Grange draws its inspiration. The run of three holes between the 8th and 10th have been compared to the run of 10th,



New Head Greenkeeper 'David Mathie' with Resort Manager Gordon Kingsford Smith



11th and 12th on the Jack Nicklaus course at St Mellion which was home to the Benson and Hedges International Open for several years. It is also possible to spot influences from Pinehurst and its relatively near neighbour, Gleneagles.

The Old Course at Letham Grange is superb and within a couple of years of opening featured in Golf World's top 50 courses in the country. A remarkable feat.

All the more remarkable when you consider that it was designed not by an Alister MacKenzie, a Jack Nicklaus, a Tom Fazio or a Donald Steel. Letham Grange was designed by Ken Smith.

Now don't waste time searching through Golf Architect directories for his name or to discover where else carries the Ken Smith stamp. You won't find anything.

Ken was a potato farmer whose dream it was to transform a Victorian mansion into a luxury hotel and built his own golf course. He was no more than an enthusiastic amateur when it came to designing golf courses but he is obviously one of those people who is a natural. Someone who could probably juggle five balls while his little chums were still learning to catch, recite Rabbin Burns while everyone else was still chanting nursery rhymes and no doubt played to scratch within two weeks of taking up golf.

Letham Grange would defy anyone to mark it down as the work of anyone other than a seasoned professional.

"He actually went to America and visited the top golf courses, brought back ideas and put them all together at Letham Grange," said Gordon.

Not only that, Ken Smith was

also hands on when it came to the construction of the golf course working closely with the then Head Greenkeeper, Jim Grainger.

"The trees that were already on the Estate had been there for 300-400 years and they just happened to be in the right place for the holes which Ken had designed. He used what nature had provided," explained Gordon.

There are only three or four holes on the Old Course which don't feature water to a greater or lesser degree with several requiring a carry over water to make the green.

The new Head Greenkeeper, David Mathie, only took over the reins at the beginning of April but there was no disguising the excitement he felt as he spoke a few days before starting work.

With the Old, and the slightly shorter but still impressive New Course, to manage David has already formulated his five year plan.

"I am going to go around the course hole by hole and assess what is required but I know that I'm going to do quite a bit of rebunkering to give the courses a bit more of a Scottish feel to them," said David, who arrived from Strathmore Golf Centre having previously worked in the the South East. He is a former student of Sparsholt College.

"I also intend to undertake a big conservation project planting 8 - 10,000 trees and, working alongside Jonathan Smith, bring in conservation areas," explained David, who also promises some fine, quick greens for August and the National Tournament players.

Letham Grange now has new owners who are keen to give the resort a major lift.



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"There is so much to offer in this area," said Gordon. "As well as our own courses we are in easy reach of Rosemount, Carnoustie, Downfield, Montrose, Strathmore and Monifeith to name just a few while St Andrews is under an hour away.

"We are also sold out for the week of next year's Carnoustie Open Championship," he revealed.

One of the innovations brought in by the new owners have been the Stones of Good Fortune which are scattered strategically around the course and now feature in the Resort's logo.

"These were put down in 1996

and blessed by a Buddhist Priest, who was also the landscape architect," explained Gordon, who added that they were giving away little pieces of the stones and asking the recipients to pass on any tales of good fortune which had occurred since.

"Amazingly two weeks after they were blessed the Queen announced the return to Scotland of the Stone of Destiny, which had been in Arbroath Abbey for hundreds of years.

"In a small way we felt involved and some of the staff went to Edinburgh to watch the Stone

come home. It's a nice tale."

Letham Grange has another unique feature in that it has the only curling rink in the world which boasts chandeliers for lighting.

"This was another innovation from Ken Smith who built the four lane curling rink in the function suite. It goes down in October and stays until March and the chandeliers are a nice quirk."

That function suite can seat 500 people and it will be the venue for the banquet on the Tuesday of the National Tournament.

"We feel that Letham Grange is a

haven of peace for our visitors - an ideal place to unwind," said Gordon.

You can't but agree and the opportunity to pit your wits against the Course that Ken Built and enjoy everything that Letham Grange has to offer is one not to be missed.

At home on the Grange

FACTFILE

Letham Grange is 4 miles from Arbroath
Arbroath is 8 miles from Carnoustie
Arbroath is 17 miles from Dundee
Arbroath is 40 miles from Perth
Arbroath is 70 miles from Edinburgh
Arbroath is 98 miles from Glasgow
Arbroath is 250 miles from York
Arbroath is 350 miles from Birmingham
Arbroath is 450 miles from London

Think Arbroath and for many what immediately comes to mind is the Arbroath Smokie - the delicious smoked fish which is cured in smoke-houses close to Arbroath Harbour.

A few miles away in Forfar they also lay claim to their own delicacy - the Forfar Bridie - a magnificent cross between a pie and a pastie.

Arbroath has a fine football team which plies its trade in the Scottish Third Division. What it is famous for, however, is having the coldest ground in Britain. Visit Gayfield Park and freeze!

The Declaration of Arbroath proclaiming Scotland's independence was signed in Arbroath Abbey in 1320 and the Stone of Destiny was housed in the Abbey for hundreds of years before being taken to London. It is now back in Scotland, in Edinburgh Castle.

Dundee is the nearest city to Letham Grange and can offer a wide range of attractions. Originally known as the City of the three Js - Jam, Jute and Journalism it is now the City of Discovery as it is home to Captain Scott's famous ship upon which he made his first polar expedition, and is also the birthplace of Dennis the Menace and Desperate

Dan! It also has Shaw's Dundee Sweet Factory, Camperdown Park with its Wildlife Centre and the superb Olympia Leisure Centre complete with five waterslides, waves and spa pool.

Glamis Castle, childhood home of the Queen Mother, is only a few miles from Letham Grange and is open to the public.

More Information can be obtained from Arbroath Tourist Information Centre Tel: 01241 872609 Fax: 01241 878550 or the Angus & Dundee Tourist Board Tel: 01382 434664 Fax: 01382 434665 E-mail: arbroath@sol.co.uk Website: <http://www.angusanddundee.co.uk>

Anyone who wishes to stay at the wonderful Letham Grange Hotel to be on hand for all the activities of the National Tournament, in association with Scotts/ Miracle should contact BIGGA Headquarters.

Angus and Dundee Tourist Board Advance Booking number for all types of other accommodation in the area is 01382 434664.