

Past Chairman, John Crawford, is now Head Greenkeeper at Stirling Golf Club and is still enjoying some great success.

Stirling service



It is rare in these modern times, for the top professional or amateur events ever to venture away from new high profile golf courses, or even those few traditional clubs which have gathered reputations throughout the history of the game. Having said that, outside of The Open, the top pros now don't seem to even get a chance of visiting the traditional favourites. Think about it. It wasn't so long ago that the European Tour visited the likes of Sunningdale, Walton Heath or Fulford in York, but now it's modern venues like The Oxfordshire, Loch Lomond, Hanbury Manor, the Forest of Arden and huge venues like Wentworth which hold the big events.

Stirling service



Right: A magnificent view of Stirling from the course

Below: John Crawford watched over by Stirling Castle



Most of the top amateur events visit the likes of Ganton, Royal Porthcawl, and Hollinwell, which simply drip with tradition and history so that's why it was so refreshing to see a top British amateur event being staged at a fine members' club making its debut in the top echelons of Championship golf. Stirling GC, in Braveheart country, is almost equidistant from Edinburgh and Glasgow and last month Europe's top amateur women converged on the parkland course, watched over by the famous castle, for the British Ladies' Stroke-play Championship.

Despite a summerful of lousy weather, which didn't offer up any concessions to the ladies the course was a credit to the club and to the Head Greenkeeper, former BIGGA National Chairman John Crawford, and his team.

"We'd been working seriously towards the Championship for at least the last year and the boys certainly enjoyed preparing the course for them and definitely wanted to impress," explained John.

"We had the greens stimping about nine or nine and a half which isn't bad for an inland course in the summer. If the weather had been better we would have been able to top dress the greens and have a drier cut which would have allowed us to present the course a little tidier," he added, before revealing that the work was done by a staff of four including himself, one YTS trainee and one summer worker.

Their achievement is all the more laudable as the course was not closed at all in the run up the Championship.

The entire club lapped up the



week with members offering to caddie and ball spot while one of the pre-Championship favourites was local member and former British Champion Alison Rose.

"It is undoubtedly the biggest event the club has ever hosted," said John.

The club, while not as old as the castle which overlooks the course, has a fine and long standing pedigree. Having said that, there is a record of golf balls being bought for King James IV in 1505, to play on the land, which now forms the golf course. Young Tom Morris was its first professional and it was the four-time Open Champion who turned the original seven hole design which had opened in 1869 to a nine holer. Another legendary name responsible for extending it to 18 holes was five-time Open Champion James Braid, of the

Great Triumvirate, who undertook the work in 1938.

So that's two huge names in the history of the game. Anyone else? Well, how about three-time Open winner Sir Henry Cotton, who redesigned the course in 1968 in readiness for the Club's centenary? He also said that irrigation for the greens was a top priority and on this recommendation it was installed at the same time as the other alterations.

There can't be many golf courses around which have been designed and altered by the winners of a grand total of 12 Open Championships.

The golf course itself offers some interesting posers for its green-keeping staff.

"Probably two thirds of the course is built on rock, and on the higher parts, the rock actually

comes through the surface and has become a feature of the course" explained John.

The 3rd hole is actually called Rocking Stone after the stone which sits behind the green.

To the uninitiated, that would seem to be a recipe for jarred wrists and broken Calloways but the real problems are caused to John and his staff, with John finding this out in spectacular fashion not long after he started.

"I decided to vertidrain the greens but little did I know that around the aprons of the green some of the irrigation pipes were only about three inches below the surface. When I put the irrigation system on in the spring it was frightening. I certainly found out where the shallow pipes were," he said laughing at the memory although probably not at the time.

Outside of three of the greens the other 15 were all constructed out of the existing land.

"We have every maintenance characteristic included in the greens. The 1st was reconstructed 25 years ago and is a pure sand green, the 9th and 13th were reconstructed about seven years ago, similar to the USGA spec, but the remainder are local soil, which was just scrapped into a pile and levelled out."

The piece de resistance however is the 14th green which must have about three different types of construction in it alone.

"They must have kept adding to the green using a different construction method each time. When you shift the hole sometimes you are in pure sand, sometimes sand and loam and on other occasions pure loam."

Equipment Inventory

- Kubota GC 36 Tractor
- Kubota 2850 Tractor +
Front Loader
- Massey Ferguson 135
Tractor
- Huxtruk + Top Dresser
- Toro Reelmaster 5100
- Toro GM 3200 + Tee and
Vert Cut Units
- Ransomes 160D GM +
Tee Units
- 4 Ransomes Super Certes
- 3 Ransomes Marquis
- Sisis Autorotorake
- Allen National
- Ryan GA30
- Ransomes Hydraulic
Gang Mowers
- Allett Gang Mowers
- 2 Sisis Spikers
- Royer Shredder
- Royer Powerscreen
- CP Sprayer
- Vertidrain
- Wessex Sweeper
- Sisis Fairway Spiker
- 2 Trailers
- 4 Stimmers
- 2 Flymos
- Cushman Dumpbox
- 3 Knapsack Sprayers



Photo: David J. Whyte

While it must have him tearing his hair out John hasn't lost his sense of humour. To the question "How do you ensure that the playing characteristics are the same?" he just laughs and says "I could say 'With great skill' but a lot of the time it is more luck than judgement."

"We have to treat each one as a separate entity with the two newest greens being treated completely different from the rest...except the 1st. It keeps the job interesting."

John, who is a native of Aberdour, in Fife, was BIGGA's National Chairman in '93-'94 and has nothing but fond memories of his year in office.

His career has taken him from Aberdour where he served his apprenticeship before moving first to Glenrothes and then on to Dunfermline GC where he was Head Greenkeeper from 1975 to 1990. During the early part of his year as Chairman he was Course Manager at Hagg's Castle in Glasgow, before arriving in the his-

toric town of Stirling.

"I would say that my year as Chairman was the highlight of my greenkeeping career. It must be as it is a great honour to be representing all this country's greenkeepers. You certainly do feel that and not just BIGGA members but all greenkeepers in the country, especially when you visit other countries."

"The one and only time I ever wore a kilt was at the GCSAA Banquet during the Conference and Show in Dallas. Wear a kilt there, and you're made!"

He also feels that he came out of his year a better greenkeeper having attended any number of education seminars regionally, nationally and internationally.

"Anyone who didn't improve as a greenkeeper would have had to have missed something. You are mixing with so many people from this country and abroad and the exchange of practical knowledge was superb."

While he is convinced that the standard of greenkeeping is

improving all the time he does feel that the fun has gone out of the industry.

"It is much more serious now and greenkeepers are under much more pressure from their employers with golf much more popular and clubs wanting their courses open 365 days a year."

You get the impression that despite this John, who his friends will be delighted to know has now recovered to full rude health, will always have time to share a laugh.

Just like the one he left me with.

"During my year as Chairman the Scottish Hayter Final was played, by coincidence, at Stirling. We decided to stop off, me still in my Chairman's red blazer, at the Granada Service Station in Stirling on the way home for something to eat. When I got to the head of the queue the guy on the till said 'It's OK, bus drivers get it for nothing'."

"So if you want a free meal wear a red jacket to a Granada Service Station," he laughs again.