

This month Greenkeeper International has visited two excellent courses which are different in so many ways. One is a members club, the other proprietary owned; one is 100 years old the other less than 10, while one has a Head Greenkeeper who has been at the club for less than a year, the other designed and built the golf course on which he now works. The one thing that Tolladine and Fingle Glen have in common is that they are both nine holers...



Done Up  
to the Nines

# One hundred not out

**Bruce Stanley visits Tolladine Golf Club near Worcester, which is celebrating its centenary this year, and finds a club with a great deal going on.**

On a clear day, the locals reckon that five counties can be seen from the combined 5th and 14th tees perched close to the highest point of Tolladine Golf Club, some 500ft above sea level.

However, when the clouds are low and rain is sweeping in from the Malvern Hills to the south-west, you will be lucky to make out the square-set tower of Worcester Cathedral, standing high above the city less than one mile away.

Not that Head Greenkeeper, Tim Davies, is too concerned. For looking at the scenery is one thing for which he has had little time since taking up his new position in October 1997.

"Although a number of holes enjoy spectacular views, the principal objective over the past year has been to raise standards and get the course into the best possible condition for its centenary year," commented Tim.

Founded in December 1898 by a group of Worcester dignitaries, the club has never had more than 14 holes. The present nine hole layout at Tolladine has been in existence since the late 1930s when almost 30 acres of land were claimed by the War Office for the building of a hospital.

Today, the course has 14 tees and nine fairways laid out on just 31.5 acres. An additional 14.5 acres rented from the Severn Trent Water

Authority provides alternative tees and fairways on the 4th and 15th holes for those golfers wishing to stretch their legs and play a different shot towards the combined 4th/13th and 6th/15th greens.

Although there is obviously very little spare land available, the undulating meadowland course still provides an excellent test of golf over its 5,432 yards - requiring 33 shots on the outward nine and 34 on the return to make par.

Tim Davies was one of three applicants short listed for the Head Greenkeeper's position at Tolladine when it was advertised in summer 1997.

Previously First Assistant at the nearby Ombersley club, Tim was delighted when his appointment was confirmed.

"However, I was concerned at the untidy condition of the course on my first proper inspection," he recalls.

"The sand in all 31 bunkers had become compacted and the grass had been allowed to grow to fairway length or longer around every green. The ball rarely moved from its landing place if it had been chipped in a little too hard or soft. There was also excessive wear on the approaches to tees and between tees and fairways where trolleys and feet had eroded the turf, causing a muddy mess in wet weather."

The club's machinery fleet also gave Tim cause for concern.

"Although two new Jacobsen walk-behind greens mowers had recently been purchased, my heart sank when I saw the age and condition of the other equipment," commented Tim.

"I realised that there was little chance of reaching an acceptable standard during our centenary year with the existing machines. Ground-driven gangs are simply not suitable for cutting fairways in the 1990s."

Fortunately, the club's members

Crushed brick has been laid on five high-wear pathways around the course. This path links the 5th and 7th tees to their respective fairways.



# One hundred not out

agreed to a proposal by the committee that a refund of VAT should go towards the purchase of a new fairway mower and tractor.

"We looked at just about every fairway mower on the market before settling on a John Deere 3235A," said Tim.

"Although all the machines performed really well when mowing, the feature which swayed the decision is the ease with which cutting height can be altered on the John Deere. Moving from 15mm or 19mm on the fairways to 27mm or 35mm for the semi-rough simply involves relocating two pins. Assistant greenkeeper and operator, Trevor Dawson, is now cutting all the fairways in five hours instead of two days."

The new tractor with mid-mount mower is used principally by assistant Wayne Kings to maintain the rougher grass and to trim among the

many trees lining the fairways. Engaged on mowing for up to three days a week, it has transformed the appearance of previously untidy areas which had been causing problems for the slightly wayward golf shot.

Having created a clear definition along the edges of the fairways, Tim has been using a pair of hand mowers to produce two different grass heights around all nine greens.

"The approaches are now cut at 15mm, the same height as the tees," he explained.

"I have also introduced an 8mm step around every green. The greens are cut no lower than 4.5mm, using the new pedestrian green mowers. The result has been a notable improvement in the overall appearance of the course, generating good response from members and visitors."

Thanks to the speed of cutting the fairways and semi-rough, the maximum 18 hours a week now required to "step" the greens' aprons and surrounds has not eaten into the time required for other course maintenance work.

Apart from introducing a regular grass-cutting schedule, Tim has also managed to renovate many of the club's existing tees and complete the rebuilding of two new tees.

Renovation started in March and involved thorough slit and tine aeration, followed by scarifying, overseeding and top dressing. A 12:4:6 granular fertiliser application ensured a good flush of growth when soil temperatures rose.

The tee building project was one of the first jobs undertaken by Tim when he arrived at Tolladine.

"The old 3rd and 12th tee was suffering from very high wear so we have constructed a brand new larger tee a short distance away and levelled off the existing 3rd tee," he commented.

"The 1st and 10th are now completely separate tees at two different levels, created by levelling a large quantity of soil adjacent to the original combined tee."

Last autumn and winter also saw Tolladine's greenkeeping team build or upgrade five important pathways and carry out repairs to walls and banking within and around the club's car park.

Using compacted crushed brick, the improvement to the paths and former walk ways has been a major success, halting erosion damage and eliminating the quagmire and mud slides which previously followed heavy rain.

"I believe the changes seen on the course over the past year fully vindicate the members' decision to direct the VAT refund towards new equipment," commented out Tim Davies.

"However, there is still plenty of work to do to maintain and improve standards."

One such out-of-season project involves installing plastic pipe from a storage tank beside the 14th tee to the only green on the course not yet irrigated - the combined 9th and 18th. As this will involve traversing one of the steepest slopes at Tolladine, Tim envisages a fair amount of awkward manual labour.

"We would also like to lay crushed brick in the car park. First appearances are very important at any golf club," he said.

"No doubt, there will be new tees to work on and bunkers to improve, all of which now contain fresh sand."

"As far as machinery goes, it will soon be housed in brand new greens sheds which should be ready before the winter. The money for this project was earmarked by the members at last December's annual general meeting."

The Tolladine greenkeeping team. From left to right, assistant Wayne Kings, Head Greenkeeper, Tim Davies, and assistant, Trevor Dawson.



## Three leading **MM** golf mixtures, quality



**Bill Pile has every right to call Fingle Glen his golf course. As Scott MacCallum found out, he only designed, built and now maintains it.**



**Done Up  
to the Nines**

# The course that Bill built



While Tim Davies is hard at work in the middle of Tolladine's centenary season in Worcestershire, Bill Pile, a good few miles further down the M5 at Fingle Glen Golf Club, in Devon, can rest easy in the knowledge that he won't have to cope with a similar situation... At least if he does he will also have an entry in the Guinness Book of Records. Why?

Well Fingle Glen, a marvellous nine holer with views over Dartmouth, is the course that Bill built, and if he were to be around when it hits its 100th birthday in 2089 he'd be a very old Head Greenkeeper indeed!

Bill, whose real roots are betrayed by a strong Midland accent, was given the almost unique opportunity for a greenkeeper of designing, building and then maintaining his own golf course and he performed, and is still performing, the last of these jobs with a passion and zeal which borders on the fanatical.

The fact that Bill is well known in the South West and South Wales Region for his forthright views on greenkeeping put him under extra pressure when just over ten years ago he accepted the challenge from a consortium of local businessmen who had bought the land with the aim of opening their own golf club.

"I really put myself on the line because if I'd built the course and it

was poor my reputation would have been shot," explained Bill, as he took me on a guided tour of his pride and joy.

He needn't have worried because Fingle Glen is a little gem which tests all the skills of the golfer, not least their stamina, as the land over which the nine holes are laid out is decidedly hilly. Rather than have that as a handicap however, the hills are used to its advantage with views which could bring a smile even on a day when the putts aren't dropping.

Amazingly for a man who'd give you the impression that greenkeeping was coursing through his veins Bill had to be lured back to the challenge of Fingle Glen from a rep's job he'd taken when he had become a little disillusioned with the industry.

He was recommended to the consortium by the pro at Crediton Golf Club where he had worked previously.

"I had redesigned the 15th at Crediton and it was one hole which was singled out by Fred Hawtree as being an excellent hole when he had once visited the club," explained Bill, who takes pride in what he achieved at Crediton.

Together with the Crediton pro Bill studied the land and decided upon a layout taking into account the need for a substantial driving range which,

at a stroke.



These three mixtures have been specifically designed for the golf course – from tee, to fairway to green.

MM10 is a mix of fescues and bents, with the slender creeping red fescue 'Mocassin', giving a dense, close knit, resilient turf for close mowing on greens and tees.

MM12's adaptable blend of species - also including 'Mocassin' - gives good colour and texture on tees and fairways, withstanding wear and giving excellent divot recovery.

And MM11, a traditional 80-20 greens mixture, fine in appearance and playing quality, offers a very stable sward with all-year-round performance.

For free technical advice on how you can take the lead with MM mixtures, or for your nearest distributor, call the **Mommersteeg Main Line on 01480 459500.**

**Mommersteeg**  **Number one seed.**

MOMMERSTEEG INTERNATIONAL, THE ANDERSON CENTRE, SPITFIRE CLOSE, ERMINE BUSINESS PARK, HUNTINGDON, CAMBS PE18 6XY.

# The course that **Bill** built

as a potential money maker, had to be given a key location on the site.

While not especially long Fingle Glen is no pushover as pros have discovered to their cost when they have paid a visit. Among the holes which stand out are the 5th, which requires supreme bravery off the tee or a long tough second shot and the 8th which is a down-hill par-3 to a small green which bears comparison with the short 11th at another course in the same part of the country - the Jack Nicklaus course at St Mellion.

Greens are cut into the hill side but to prevent golfers benefiting from shots played above the green and allowed to roll on swails have been built in the side of the slope to prevent this and offer instead a tricky little pitch. Thus the brave shot to the heart of the green is rewarded.

"I was very artistic at school and I suppose that was what gave me the ability to design a golf course," he says, by way of an explanation.

While not underestimating the challenge involved in designing the course perhaps it was in the building of it that Bill really earned his stripes.

Other than a week's holiday which had been booked before the project had begun Bill spent a year building

the course without a single day off.

"By the end of it I was so fit, I'd lost two stones, and I could have jumped over a house," said Bill, who at 51 still looks as though he could give Linford Christie a run for his money.

It was very much a hands-on affair with members of the consortium lending a hand with the work while Bill also found himself assisting with the construction of the clubhouse-hotel complex.

"When the builders arrived I'd make sure that everything they needed was in place for them as it saved time and therefore money," said Bill, who also turned his hand to fitting the huge Fingle Glen lettering to the side of the building and erecting flagpoles.

"I pretty much did everything except the wiring and I shudder to think of some of the things I got up to. If I'd sat a bit longer before getting stuck in I'd surely have thought better of it on many occasions."

On of the benefits of constructing his own course was that Bill was able to make sure that time and effort was put into the things that might otherwise cause problems in the long run.

"The greens were all built properly with herring bone drainage and

The Fingle Glen greenkeeping team; Bill Pile (centre), his son, (left) and Brian Ridgeway (right).

Below; This magnificent bridge was single-handedly built by Brian Ridgeway.



sometimes with the main drain on the low side with the others feeding in.

"The bunkers are also drained properly so water never lies in them."

That said the course isn't as totally maintenance friendly as you might suspect.

"If I felt that a hole would be a better one from the playing point of view I did it at the expense of maintenance because ultimately we are there for the benefit of the golfers after all," said Bill, and evidence of this comes in the shape of a huge bunker which guards the right hand side of the 9th green.

To create the base material for the greens Bill dug two huge ponds which themselves have become integral parts of the course with their fair share of wildlife to distract the golfer. One of them, on the right side of the 9th is a real ball magnet - ideally placed as it is for the educated slice.

The greens were all turfed in the October and the course opened on the 4th of July the following year, making it a real Independence Day for Bill. The entire golf course plus

the equipping of the maintenance shed was completed for the princely sum of £120,000 which even giving allowances for a decade of inflation shows what can be done with a degree of commitment, sweat, tears and a shrewd business brain - the maintenance equipment was bought predominately second hand.

"By the end of the year I was extremely tired but also immensely satisfied," explained Bill, who has been asked to offer advice on other projects.

His efforts were recognised by the owners who erected a plaque on a tree at the back of the 9th green crediting Bill for all the work he did on the course.

Unfortunately, however, the consortium was still finding its feet when the recession hit and interest rates rocketed and Fingle Glen went into receivership but the new owners have just as much faith in Bill's ability to maintain the course as his original employers had in his designing and building it.

He doesn't think it's an easy option maintaining a nine hole course a task he carries out with the help of his son, Bill, and Brian Ridgeway. Each of the holes has two tees to enable golfers to play 18 slightly different holes but he believes the problems of managing a nine holer are greater than those experienced on 18 hole courses.

"It is much harder to maintain a nine hole course than an 18 holer because each green is played twice so has around 80,000 rounds on them each. That gives severe wear problems."

You can bet that those problems provide just the sort of incentive Bill needs to get himself going in the morning as he laps up every moment on his own golf course.

"I'm delighted when people come, play and enjoy the course. It makes all the work worthwhile," he says, with true feeling.

