

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.



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