

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.

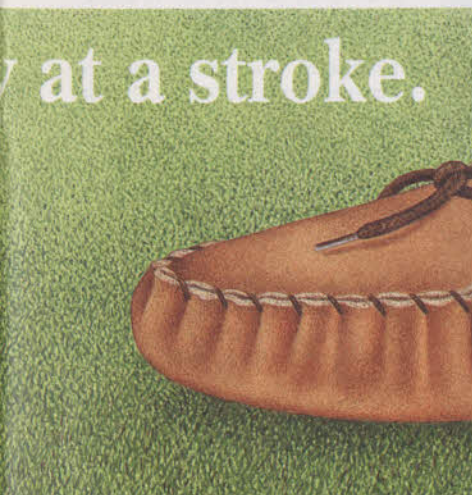
He needn't have worried because Fingle Glen is a little gem which tests all the skills of the golfer, not least their stamina, as the land over which the nine holes are laid out is decidedly hilly. Rather than have that as a handicap however, the hills are used to its advantage with views which could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

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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.

