

Euan Grant has come a long way in four and a half years and now has one of the most interesting and diverse jobs possible.

G Ahead of the Game



Above: The course is carved from a wonderful piece of land

Below: Euan Grant with Westerham Head Greenkeeper, Chris Moor



In the Assistant's Profiles which appear regularly in Greenkeeper International the final question, "What do you expect to be doing in 10 year's time?" invariably produces the response "Be a Head Greenkeeper or Course Manager at a top club," although occasionally someone says "Spending my lottery millions."

Euan Grant, the 1994 Toro Student of the Year, is well ahead of schedule... and some. Unfortunately for him he is not enjoying the fruits of successfully picking the same six numbers as those thrown up by Lancelot one Saturday night but that, a mere four and a half years after becoming top student, he is in

charge of his own 18 hole course. Oh, and he's also the man in charge of another 18 holer just about to open; Head Groundsman at two football training grounds and an advisor for two football league grounds. In total he has around 20 people under his charge.

When Euan first came to the green-keeping world's notice he was working at Effingham Golf Club but it was not long before he moved to take up the Deputy Head Greenkeeper's job at Royal Jersey, a links course which, as part of his master plan, was supposed to open the door eventually to him working at an Open venue.

He then received the telephone call

which was to drag him back to the mainland, amend his ultimate goal, and give him the sort of opportunity many more experienced greenkeepers would give their eye teeth for.

"I was in the Mess Room and someone handed my a mobile phone. The voice on the other end said 'It's Ron Noades here. I know you're coming over to Harrogate next week. Can you come and see me?' said Euan who admitted that, being a rugby man, he had no idea he was speaking to the famous Crystal Palace Chairman, and the man who after famously selling the club to Mark Goldberg, is now Chairman/Manager of Brentford.

"I mouthed the name 'Ron Noades'

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to the boys and when I came off the phone they, being football fans, asked if it was THE Ron Noades. I said I didn't know but that I was to meet him at Selhurst Park."

That meeting was to see him installed as Head man at the still to be opened Westerham Golf Club, near Biggin Hill, in Kent, and subsequently to be Clerk of Works and the man responsible for the successful growing in of the new and spectacular Happy Valley Golf Club, in Caterham, Surrey, developing the Crystal Palace Training Ground at Streete Court in Godstone, assisting with Brentford's training ground at Griffin Park, and Brentford's stadium.

Far right: A beautiful vista of Westerham Golf Club and beyond

Below: The Westerham greenkeeping team with Lossie, the extra member



When Euan started in 1996 he joined Chris Moor, then Deputy and now Head Greenkeeper, as half of a staff of two.

"I met Chris on site and had a discussion about how things were going and what we were going to do," explained Euan, 28.

"I had pages of A4 notes with questions I hadn't, at that point, been able to get answers to and we went through them all," recalled Chris, whose duties had included carrying bags of fertiliser on foot for up to a mile, returning for more, and then going round the green with a hopper.

"The two biggest hurdles we had to overcome was staff and money. We had no staff and no money. So we put a plan together and took it to Ron and told him that we needed to spend £250,000 straight away or he wasn't going to have his course open in a year from then.

"Ron is a very fair and reasonable man and although it took him by surprise he gave us the money and gave us the staffing," said Euan, who also appreciates the benefits of working for a football man for whom a quarter of a million represents the fee for a reserve goalkeeper.

They then head hunted some good greenkeepers, persuading them that Westerham would be a good move for them. The club started selling memberships and as it looked like a golf course, and a fine one at that prior to opening, 1000 were sold in about six weeks.

The course is cut from heavy

woodland, assisted by the great storm of 1987 when a lot of mature trees were blown down, and was planned out using aerial photographs and ordinance survey maps.

"There was a lot of natural regeneration over the 242 acres and we've done an awful lot of thinning of trees which were just six inches apart," explained Euan.

With Westerham on the right track, the excellent new clubhouse is nearing completion, attention was turned towards Streete Court, and Crystal Palace's training ground.

"We developed Streete Court which has five Premier League standard training pitches and six acres of formal gardens which we maintain.

"The pitches are sand construction with full irrigation, dwarf rye which we've over sown with fescue and it has established well. The first year was bliss, but then the players came down and anyone involved with football training will know what damage 70 people training seven days a week - because they've also got a School of Excellence at the weekend - can do."

Being involved in both greenkeeping and groundsmanship has given Euan an insight into what is required to achieve success in each.

"The general skills of turf maintenance are the same but the headaches are completely different. I do lots of aeration during the summer period on the golf courses, normally the final aeration we do is about October and we won't do any more until we start vertidrainage the

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fairways in March. That is pretty much the same with the football.

"The only time we have a worry is when we get a bit of compaction on the football grounds and we then choose the driest day to get out there and open the surface up."

With Streete Court on track, attention was then turned to the construction of Happy Valley Golf Club which if Euan and Ron are to be believed is on an even finer piece of golfing land than Westerham.

"It has been designed by David Williams who also did Westerham, and where Westerham is shorter and tighter Happy Valley is long and open. They're both going to be real tests of golf."

Euan was the Clerk of Works of the Happy Valley site ensuring that all decisions and plans were followed through and he ensured that greenkeeping staff were employed from an early stage.

"That meant when something was done we were straight on top of it to assist with the finishing off."

With three main sites in Caterham, Godstone and Westerham Euan spends quite a bit of time behind the wheel but it also has resulted in the employment of a mechanic, Trevor Tuppen, to work between all three sites. There is a workshop at each venue, and a driver, who works closely with the mechanic to transport machinery from site to site.

Euan is quick to attribute his success to education. He already had a degree in Sports and Leisure

Management when he moved into greenkeeping and is keen to promote the benefits of education to his team.

"I spend a lot of time looking into greenkeeper education. I do believe that the NVQ system is the way to go but feel that after Level 2 there isn't a great deal of scientific knowledge. I don't want to put a 19 year old lad on to Level 3, because I don't think he's either ready for it or needs the type of information that is being taught at that stage in his career."

Euan is therefore investing in more practical courses, covering among others First Aid, Chainsaws and spraying.

"We have a fairly formal education plan on site which takes the Black Book a stage further for the guys who have got Level 2. Chris, Mark Thornton (Head Greenkeeper at Happy Valley) and myself will get them to do not just what the Black Book says but how we want it done as well."

With regard to his own education, bearing in mind his role is more administrative and the time spent out on the course working is limited, it is perhaps surprising that he sees soil science rather than budgeting and managerial skills as the way he wants to go.

"The majority of my job is looking for ways to make the company as efficient as possible and it is not possible to do that without agronomic greenkeeping knowledge. I'm responsible to the accountant and to Ron and I'd really love to get them to some



BIGGA meetings to give them a bit of knowledge. They could then see where the money is being spent."

As far as the future is concerned Happy Valley opens later this year and Euan's job, which has just grown and grown since he started, will just

keep on getting bigger.

"Four and a half years ago I'd have been looking to have definitely been a Head Greenkeeper, or perhaps a Deputy at a top club," he said.

As I said at the beginning. He's ahead of schedule.

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