

**Caversham Heath Golf Club is a new venture that is being developed on 250 acres of the Mapledurham Estate near Reading in Berkshire. Robert Clive, General Manager, and Jon Scoones, Head Greenkeeper, provide an insight into the construction of the course from the design phase through the growing-in period to completion and final preparation prior to opening in spring 2000.**



# From design to play



Bunkers at the turn of the dogleg on the par 5, 4th hole with the green in the distance. Note the mature woodland to the right of the fairway

Once outline planning permission had been granted to build a golf course, practice facilities and a large Clubhouse, Mapledurham Estate set about creating their long wished for golf course on 250 acres of land. The site had previously been arable farmland with ancient woodland located centrally and around the borders.

The Estates' first decision was to appoint Barreldfield Golf Ltd to project manage the operation "from design to play" and beyond. David Williams was invited to design a heathland-style Championship length, quality 18-hole golf course. The topography of the area features land that is gently rolling without

being hilly or flat and therefore he had many natural features and contours to work with. The main requirements from a design viewpoint were to create a challenging course while catering for the needs of golfers of all abilities. David created a course that is 7100 yards from the Championship tees, 6500 yards from

the social and 6000 yards from the ladies. Whitnell Contracts Ltd was appointed to build the course, with the comprehensive irrigation system sub-contracted to Ocmis.

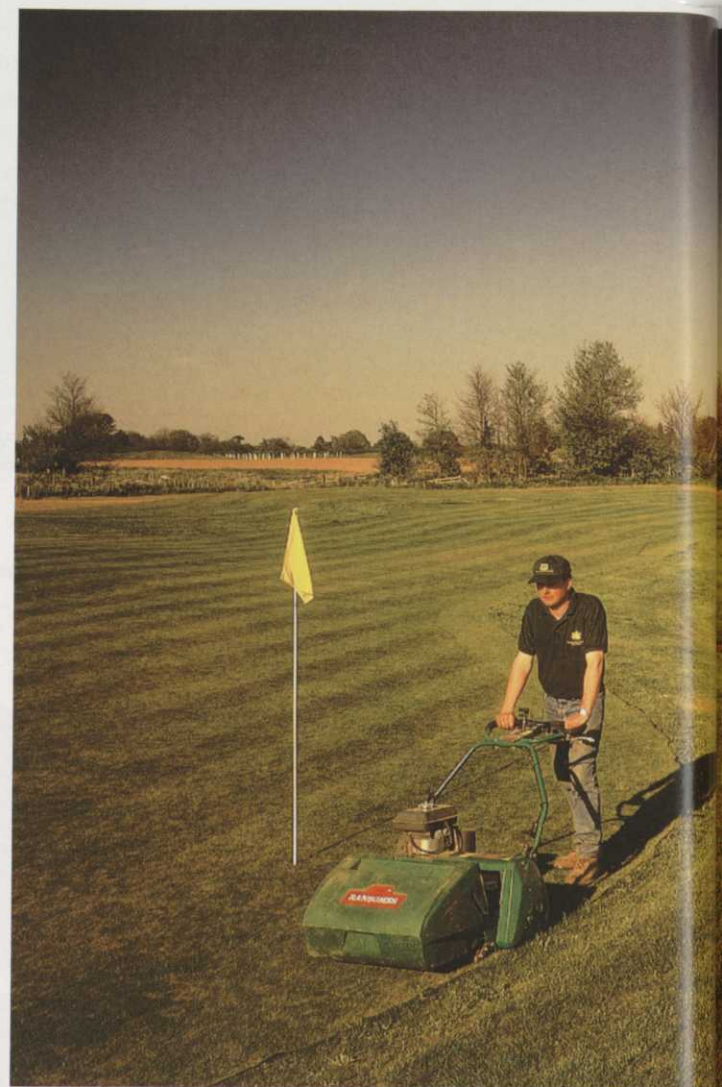
The course build started in June 1998. All the USGA greens were built and seeded in the autumn of 1998, as were all the tee complexes. The fairways, bunker surrounds, approaches and rough, which required the stone removal were all seeded early in spring 1999. When the course opens in April, the fairways and rough will have been seeded for about 13 months and the tees and greens for 20 months.

**Below: Stone burying and levelling on the 14th and 15th fairway**

**Right: Head Greenkeeper, Jon Scoones undertaking an early cut of the double 6th/16th green**



The first step of the construction process was to strip the top soil from the whole site. This involved moving in the region of 300,000 square metres of soil. Once stripped, the subsoil which had been exposed was shaped to David Williams' detailed plans. The earth moving involved construction of some 100 bunkers, 18 grass hollows and two lined lakes. The top soil that had been stripped off had all the larger stones (15mm and bigger) removed. Two methods were used, vibration screening and mechanical stone picking. This removed 4,500 tonnes of stone, but left sufficient small stones to ensure



that structure and drainage were not adversely affected. After the picked soil was returned, it was then stone buried to leave three to five inches of stone free soil on which to seed.

In tandem with the subsoil shaping and top soil stone removal, a fully comprehensive irrigation system was laid by Ocmis Irrigation. This is a fully computerised, state of the art system with over 500 rainbird sprinkler heads enabling the watering all tees, greens, approaches and fairways with the twin row system. Approximately 18 miles of piping has been laid under the course.

Although constructed on a naturally free draining soil, a 9.5 mile drainage system was laid. With the heavy recent rains, this has been fully tested and is working well. The course management are confident that it will take exceptionally heavy rains to enforce a course closure.

Jon Scoones, Head Greenkeeper, takes up the story:

The first major task on the course was to establish the sward on the greens. When I arrived in March 1999, the greens had been rolled three or four times and had just received their first cut. The greens had suffered from lack of nutrition and Damping Off had been present in some of them, so these we sprayed with a contact fungicide and overseeded at 5gm with Bent and Fescue before building nutrition levels up to

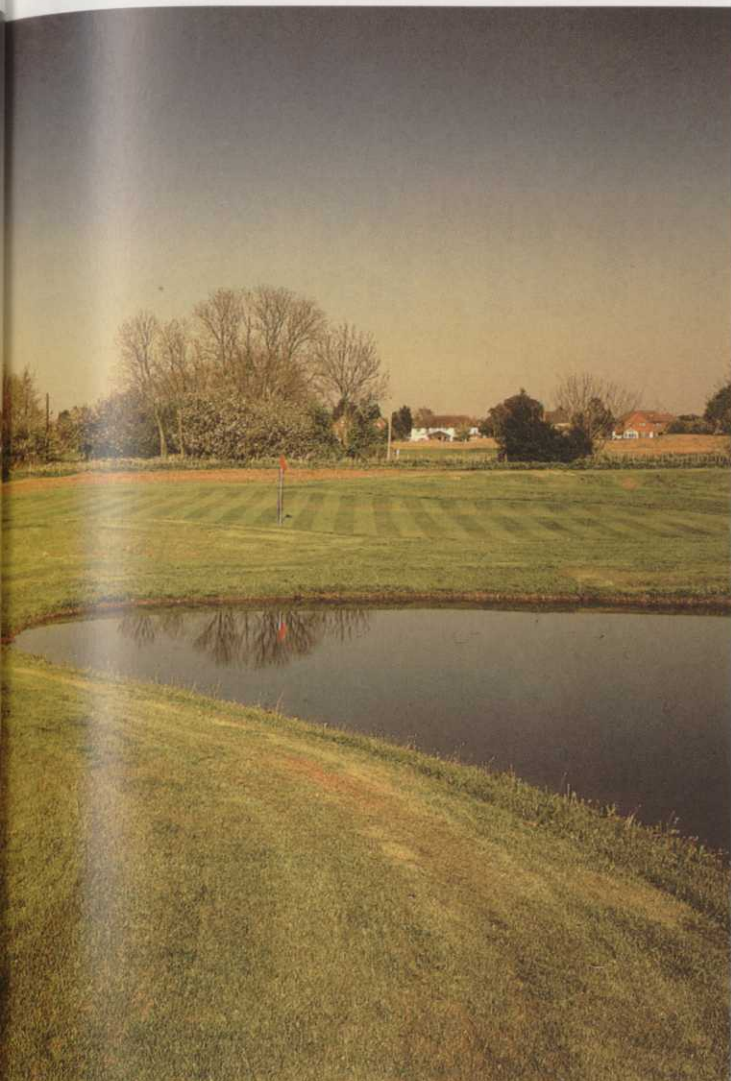
an acceptable amount. This quickly established sward density as well as promoting root growth deep into the rootzone.

The tees were in a similar condition to the greens and the fairways and semi were still being stone buried and prepared for seeding.

The next decision that had to be taken was the selection of the machinery required for the upkeep and maintenance of the course. We chose the local Textron dealers TH White Ltd as our major supplier and with the help of their Sales Manager Alun Wright and Paul Wright of Barreldfield, we specified the machinery that would be best suited to the course. At the time the only equipment we had were an Iseki 538 tractor, 2 Hayter Harrier pedestrian rotary mowers and an Allett Gazelle cylinder mower used for cutting greens. We decided on two Ransomes AR250s to mow fairways and semi-rough with the idea that the mulching decks would help to thicken the sward as well as building up a fibre layer over stony soil. This worked exceptionally well and we quickly established an excellent covering.

For the greens we chose three Greens Super 50 pedestrian greens mowers as well as having two G-Plex II's - one for the greens, one for the tees. When the machines were demonstrated to us I found them very easy to work on, especially the





G-Plex's with the swing out middle unit. We also purchased an Iseki SF300 compact out-front rotary with flail attachment, a 4 wheel Cushman Turf-Truckster with a Hardi Boss Sprayer, a Jacobsen topdresser, one Jacobsen Sand Scorpion electric bunker rake, an MF1020 compact tractor with front loader and grab plus one Ransomes Marquis cylinder mower.

By May the earlier seeded areas were starting to establish rapidly and were being topped with AR250's at a height of 50mm.

We appointed Trevor Humphrey as Deputy Head Greenkeeper and Peter McFadden as First Assistant and took on two trainees. We also kept on two experienced Whitnells staff to help with the extensive mowing required in June and July.

The fairways were shaped out during August when the growth slowed down and we were able to bring the height of cut down to 20mm leaving semi-rough at 50mm. The shaping of the fairways was determined by a number of factors; firstly the architect had his design, which we kept to religiously, only altering it to marry in with the semi-rough around bunkers and surrounds, while at the same time fitting in with the irrigation coverage.

By September the height of cut had been brought down to 18mm with semi-rough and surrounds at 40mm.

Winter was soon upon us and we concentrated our work on adding to the 1000m of paths that were put in initially by the contractors.

We have a four year wood management programme which started this winter; this includes taking out many dead elm trees as well as scrub clearance in the ancient woodland.

Through autumn and winter, phase 2 of planting progressed with more gorse, mature hardwood trees and shrubs going in, taking total planting to in excess of 60,000.

The philosophy behind the club from the very start has been "quality". The course has been designed and built to the highest standards. The same can be said for the clubhouse that is due for completion in March. It is a magnificent building that blends with the surrounding countryside and is located to maximise the wonderful views over the golf course and surrounding woods and farmland.

Naturally, putting such an emphasis on quality doesn't come cheap and there has been considerable capital outlay in the lead up to the spring opening. The members that have joined the club and who will join the club do so because they have seen that the quality of site, design, build and maintenance on the course and clubhouse are of the very highest standards. Corners have not been cut, we have been patient and it shows.

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