

Scott MacCallum travelled to North Wales to meet a man and machine with quite a story to tell...

A little piece of history

In 1932 Rhos on Sea Golf Club on the coast of North Wales, close to Colwyn Bay, took delivery of the first Ransomes Overgreen to leave the Ipswich factory.

Sixty-seven years later that same Overgreen - No B301 - was wheeled out, in pristine condition having been renovated by the club's owner, to celebrate the club's centenary and the 50th anniversary of Head Greenkeeper, Aneurin Hughes', arrival at the club.

That bare fact shows a level of continuity that would be the envy of most clubs. More so when you consider that in the 100 years the club has had just two Head Greenkeepers. Hughie Evans became the club's first Head man in 1908 and held the post up until 1959 when Aneurin took over. As Aneurin edges towards his official retirement age next March, the third Head Greenkeeper has been appointed. Diana Blundell, the daughter of club owner Frank Lithgow, has a steep mountain to climb if she is to be judged on longevity, but having spent time at Mere in Manchester, she brings with her the modern day skills required to do the job at the turn of the millennium.



As Aneurin admits, "She's got a lot more qualifications than I have."

The fact that the first Ransomes Overgreen found its way to North Wales was down to the club's then owner, J.B. Brear, who arrived at the club as club professional just after the first war.

"When the club came up for sale in the early 20s he bought a good share of it and by the 50s he'd bought about 90% of the shares," explained Aneurin.

"He was a very advanced, forward thinking man in terms of engineering as he had been a Chief Engineer in the Royal Navy and at the club whenever anything new came out he'd try it and if he liked it, he'd buy it. This was also the case with fertilisers which he brought to the club and weedkillers. He was one of the first to try weedkillers. He also worked closely with R.B. Dawson, of Bingley, on greenkeeping matters."

Remarkably the Overgreen was still in regular use up until the early 1970s by which time it had more than earned its retirement which it spent in Mr Lithgow's store.

"In the summer I used to

go out at first light and cut all 18 greens in about three and a half to four hours then raise the height of the units and go out and cut all the tees," said Aneurin, who added that the greens were cut every day in the summer.

Because the Overgreen didn't have a tight turning circle greens have to be cut in halves which gave them a light and shade, black and tan look.

It also had a range of Sisis attachments for hollow tining, slit tining, rollers and brushes.

"The Overgreen made the job an awful lot quicker but for special occasions like Captain's Day we used to take one of the 16 inch cutting units and push it by hand. We did that until the mid 50s."

Having worked at the club since he was 14 - he never ever considered leaving - Aneurin has seen many changes within the game and the industry itself.

"After I'd been here about a year I asked the boss if I could play and he said no. I had to have lessons from the professional, when he could fit me in, then play with the professional and the Captain to see what I'd learned about etiquette. Then I was given a leaflet about etiquette which I had to learn, and then brought before the committee to answer questions on etiquette. It was the same for any junior.

It was a shame when that was stopped," he said, adding that it was in the mid 60s when golf increased in popularity that he noticed etiquette standards beginning to drop.

As far as greenkeeping is concerned Aneurin can recall mixing his own fertilisers from hoof and horn and dried blood.

Getting back to cutting greens every day in the summer. It was in part due to the home made fertilisers boosting the grass to the extent that they grew by quarter of an inch a day.

"Mixing fertilisers was much more interesting and there was much more of a challenge to it than there is today."

Rhos on Sea has gone back to a more organic approach in the last five years.

"We starved everything for at least 12 months to get rid of all the chemicals. It did look terrible but the club decided to bite the bullet."

The moment when the Overgreen was wheeled out was an emotional one for Aneurin.

"It was thrilling. Mr Lithgow had reground and sharpened the blades, repainted it, given it a good decoke, cleaned the points and the plugs and it started first time. I cut the 18th green with it a few times before it went back into storage. To me it is priceless."

