

Last year Tony James played out of his skin to becoming the first winner of the Charterhouse/Scotts National Championship. This year it could be you...



# A Championship of Distinction



Above: Last year's winners flanked by Richard Minton of Scotts and David Jenkins of Charterhouse. L-R Tony McLure, Tony James and David Cuthbertson and Bert Cross representing the Northern region.

The two venues for this year's Charterhouse/Scotts National Championship for the BIGGA Challenge Trophy may well be familiar to some of those people lucky enough to be playing in this year's event.

St Annes Old Links hosted the 1995 National Tournament while its near neighbour, Fairhaven, welcomed the Hayter Challenge Finalists in 1996 as well as both Rest of the

World and Americas teams in the country for the Hayter International Cup.

If there are any qualifiers or entrants who played on either, or both, of those occasions they will know the treat that is in store for them on September 25 and 26 this year.

The abiding memory of those who tackled St Annes in the summer of '95 will be the scorching heat which

drew the last bit of energy out of everyone who played well before they reached the sanctuary of the 19th but the difficult conditions will not have masked the excellence of the course they had the privilege of playing.

Masterfully maintained by Geoff Whittle and his team St Annes is very much a traditional links which adds degrees of difficulty depending upon how hard the wind blows.

If that were not enough since our

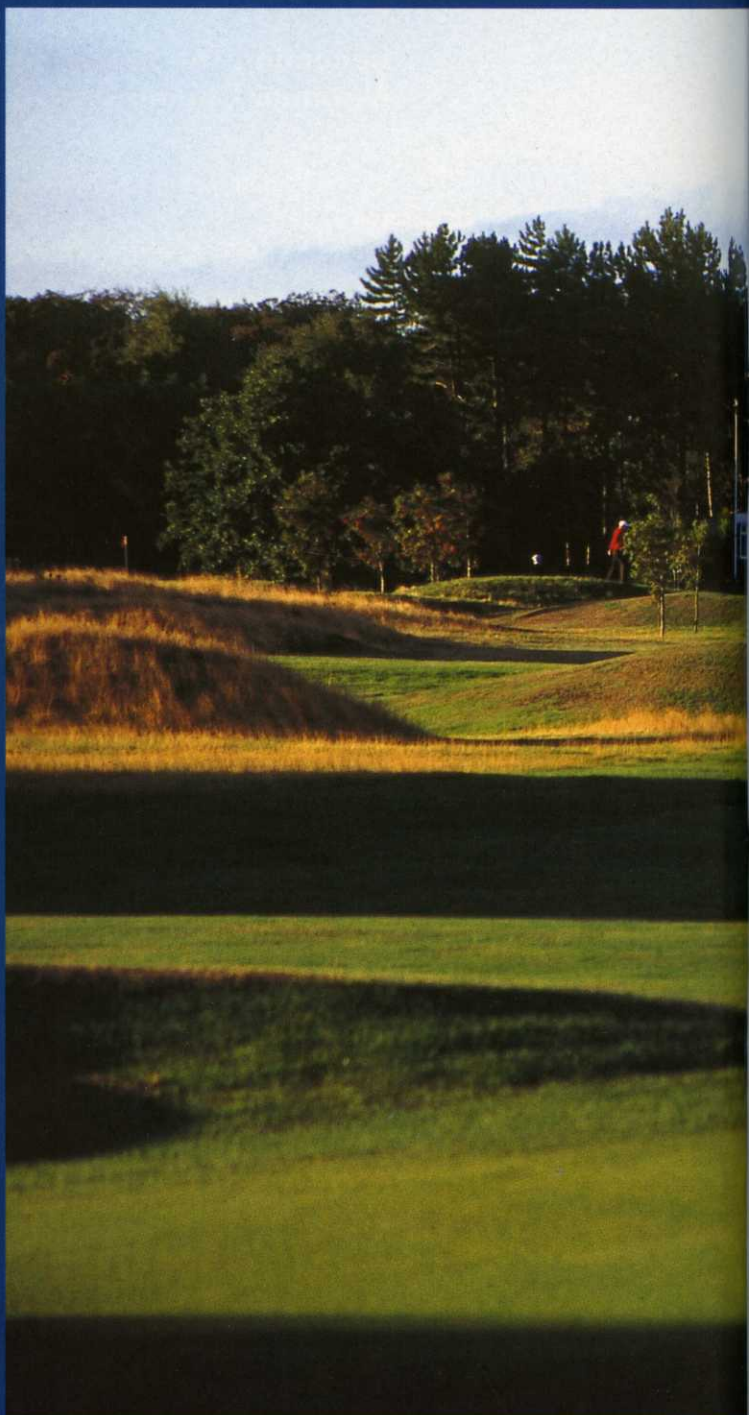
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Peter Simpson of Fairhaven.



Geoff Whittle of St Annes Old Links.



previous visit the course has also been tightened up!

"Yes, we've put in some extra bunkering in the driving landing areas on the 2nd and 6th holes. It was getting too easy," laughed Geoff, who has been at the club for 11 years.

"The committee felt that it needed toughening up a little in places as it does depend on the weather for its defences."

The decision was influenced by the fact that the club hosted an Open Qualifiers when the Championship was last at nearby Royal Lytham & St Annes in 1996...an honour it will also have next year as well.

"Last time it was dead calm and

the scoring was low. We had a 65 by Richard Boxall for example," explained Geoff, who has recently taken delivery of a several new pieces of kit courtesy of a leasing agreement with Burrows, the local Textron dealer.

As well as the bunkering, which brings the total number on the course to 138, some new Championship tees have been built and the addition of a couple of ponds, one behind the 7th green and another behind the 14th green.

"We needed a huge amount of spoil to build some new Championship tees so we created our own by digging the ponds which, although not affecting play too

much, create a bit of interest," said Geoff.

The pond at the rear of the 7th, which is perhaps more in play from the 15th, boasts a nice touch.

"There is an island in the middle of the pond and one of the friends of the Greens Chairman asked us to put an suggestion box on the island. We did this and it's gone down very well."

Geoff is looking forward to the army of his peers who will descend on the course in September.

"I know they all enjoyed coming here last time apart from the incredible heat. It was a big tournament for us and I hope it is the same this year."

Oh yes. One other change since 1995 which will raise a cheer from those who played then. The clubhouse now has air conditioning!

St Annes will host the first round of the 36 hole Championship with Fairhaven picking up the baton for the second and final day.

Although only a couple of miles from St Annes, Fairhaven is a different type of golf course altogether – tree lined and secluded. In fact, Peter Simpson, the Head Greenkeeper describes it as a semi links.

"We've got the bunkers of a links course but we've not got the rolling fairways while, of course, we've also got trees," said Peter, who like Geoff



is a former Royal Lytham man.

"I think the National Championship will be a good test because they will be playing two different courses – an out and out links where the wind blows and another which is a bit more picturesque but which is equally tough."

To illustrate the point Peter describes the work that has been carried out on the par-3 17th which has made a difficult hole more difficult.

"We've altered the bunkering around the green so that it is now surrounded by eight pot bunkers while we've removed the mound at the rear of the green so that now, if you go

long, you risk going out of bounds."

When you're hitting at least a 5-iron into the green, and it's all carry, it could never be described as a cake walk.

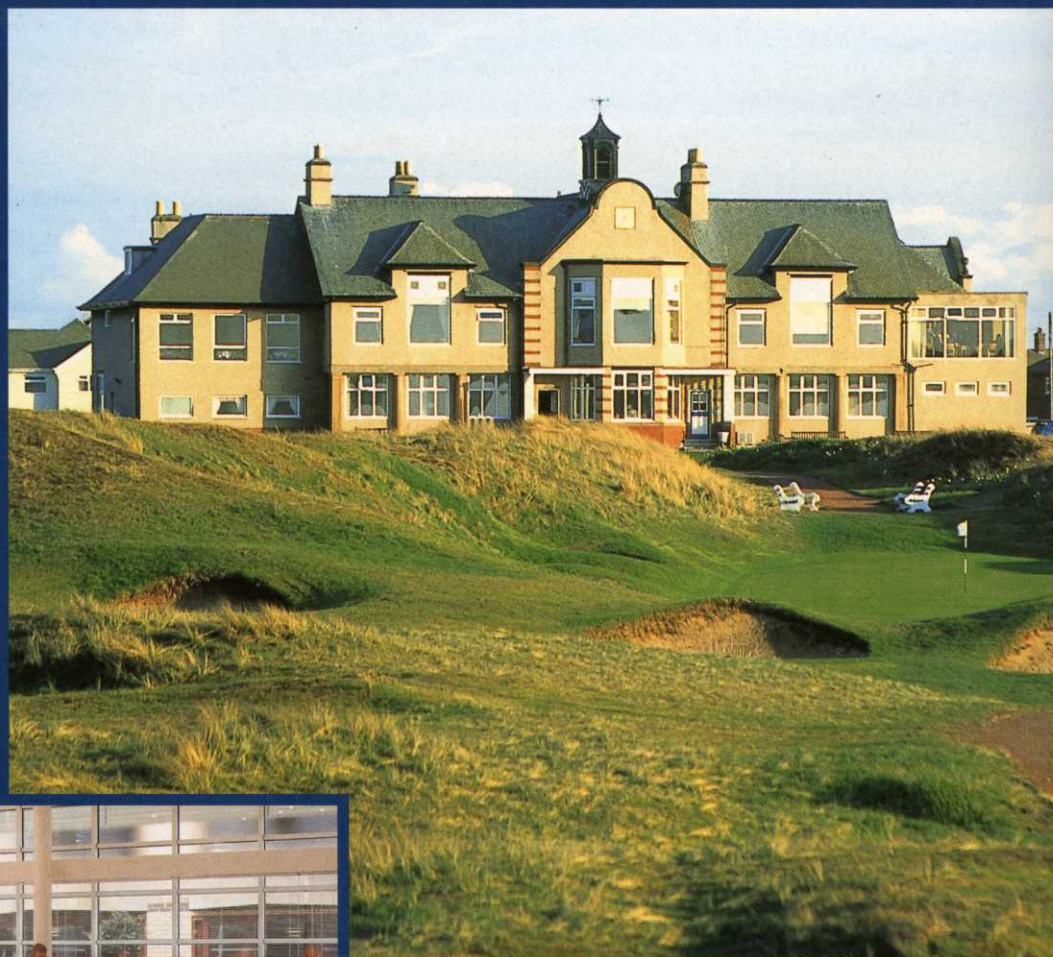
Having said that the course did hit the headlines during the '96 Open Qualifying when local favourite Royal Lytham tournament professional Paul Eales, desperate to play the Championship over his home course birdied the final five holes at Fairhaven to scrape into the final field. Admittedly there are two par-5s in those final five holes but it was still a mighty feat.

The course record was set during that same qualifying event. A 64, which might have been two less had

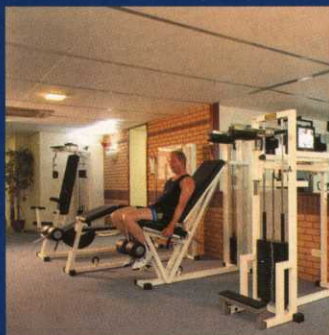


One of the new ponds at St Annes – Complete with a easily accessible suggestions box!

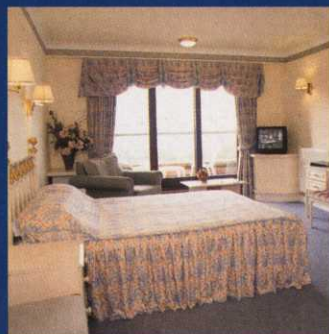
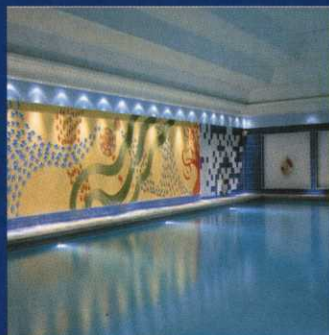
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Right: St Annes Old Links.



Some of the excellent features to be found at the Dalmeny Hotel.



not two relatively straight forward birdies been missed, including one at the last, by a certain Justin Leonard, who went on to become Open Champion at Royal Troon 12 months later.

"The club was delighted to have an Open Champion as course record holder and made him a member of the club," revealed Peter.

"We're hoping he'll find time to come over and play the course again next year."

Another change from our '96 visit is on the 3rd which used to have a big bunker guarding the left hand side of the fairway but which now has two pot bunkers.

In many ways Peter had the toughest task of any of the greenkeepers who have hosted a BIGGA event. Not only did he have the British and Irish contingent he also had to present his course to some of the top superintendents and greenkeepers from the rest of the world in the shape of the Hayter International players who had competed at West Lancashire Golf club earlier that week.

"We try to produce a golf course which is good all the year round and it is nice to have some greenkeeping professionals playing here. It is our professional pride which ensures that it is in good shape for them," said Peter.

"Our season is from Good Friday to the end of September and we try to have it at its best all the time during that period so when the National Championships are played it should be in good shape," said Peter.

The Championship Hotel for the event is the Dalmeny, on Lytham's South Promenade. An excellent hotel it boasts, three restaurants, a heated indoor swimming pool and extensive leisure and gym facilities while all bedrooms are equipped with satellite television.

The Lytham area boast many attractions including Blackpool's world famous pleasure park. Britain's most visited tourist attraction the park includes the death defying Big One, the mother of all roller coasters while the equally terrifying Valhalla, built at a cost of £15 million, will have opened by the time we descend on the town to play the event.

Think about it a couple of visits to these two rides and the four footer on the 18th to win a prize is not going to appear quite so frightening.

Anyone wishing to enter the Charterhouse/Scotts National Championship and book into the Dalmeny Hotel should contact Sarah Sowerby at BIGGA HOUSE for further information. Tel: 01347 833800.