

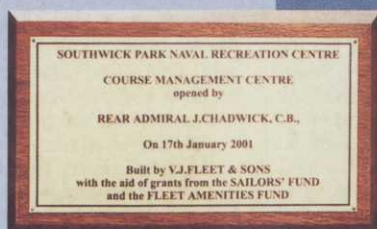
Scott MacCallum travelled to Portsmouth to see at first hand Southwick Park Naval Recreational Base's excellent new Course Management Centre

# Ship shape at Southwick



Right: Rear Admiral J. Chadwick C.B. chats with Southwick Park's Head Greenkeeper Nick Beadle (centre) at the grand opening

Below: A commemorative plaque marks the auspicious occasion



It was a marvellous occasion. The sort of thing the Royal Navy does so well. Pomp, ceremony, precision timing and a decorated dignitary to say a few well chosen words and seal the moment with a well propelled bottle of champagne or, as on this occasion, a neatly snipped ribbon.

But this wasn't the launch of a new frigate, nor was it the passing out parade for the season's new officer cadets, but the opening of the brand new Course Management Centre at Southwick Park Naval Recreation Base, alongside HMS Dryad, near Portsmouth - the Navy's own municipi-

pal golf club. The opening was carried out by Rear Admiral J. Chadwick C.B watched by several other high ranking Royal Navy Officers.

They also marked the end of an era during which the greenkeeping team had operated from three less than satisfactory buildings spread out over the golf course, a situation which did much to test the team's survival instincts and little to extend the life of machinery.

The new facility includes all that could have been asked from a building and was achieved at a cost which didn't make the Navy baulk.

The morale boost provided by the new accommodation was apparent as

soon as I arrived. Surprised to see everything closed up I entered by the side door to find Head Greenkeeper Nick Beadle delivering a fine off break which assistant Simon Berry could only edge onto the back door of the main facility which, in the rules of the game, meant he was out caught behind.

I hasten to add that, in the interests of safety and damage limitation, a soft ball was in use.

"We like to play a bit of cricket at lunchtime or football, as we've got a goal down on the pitch and putt course," explained Nick, who was blowing a bit after his bowling stint.

Right: The old maintenance facilities were badly in need of renovation, which resulted in a brand new complex (far right)

Below: A purpose built wet room provides the team with facilities to change and dry work gear in comfort



#### Equipment Inventory

##### Tractor Units

Hayter LT324  
2 John Deere 2653As  
Toro 216-D  
John Deere 455  
Huxley Greenstar  
Huxley Huxtruck  
LF3800  
Ford 1910  
Ford 1220  
2 Kawasaki Mules

##### Attachments

Bobcat Shredder/Chipper  
Charterhouse Rapid core  
Huxley Topdresser  
Hardi Sprayer  
Allman Sprayer  
Wessex Brickbox  
Wessex Trailer  
Wessex Rotovator  
Two Tonne Trailer  
Lewis Landlugger 33  
John Deere Brush  
John Deere Blade  
LF3800  
Sisis Fairway Slitter  
Huxley Scarifier  
Rotary Deck  
Huxley Back Box

##### Hand Machinery

4 Supercertes  
GS55  
2 Stihl Blowers  
Stihl Chainsaw  
Husqvarma Chainsaw  
Robin Dagger  
Allen Strimmer  
Stihl Stimmer  
Allen Flymo  
Push Leafblower  
Jetstar Blower  
Hedge Cutter

##### Suppliers

Tacit  
Sheerwater-Headland  
Avoncrop  
Grass Roots  
Rigby Taylor  
Winchester Gdn Mach  
TH White  
DJ Scott

"We have a rule that there is no smoking and we must change our footwear in the drying room and at the moment everyone is sticking to it," he explained as we sat in his well appointed, and remarkably tidy, office.

The genuine enthusiasm and rapport within the team has been enhanced by the new living and working environment which is a far cry from what was in place before.

"We had three separate sites - the Top Shed, the Tea Shed and the Boat House. The Top Shed was made of tin and was old, rusty and small. We used to keep the greens mower, two John Deeres; a Toro, a Hayter a Hux Truck and two mules in there so we had seven or eight pieces of equipment stored in there. But it only had one door so we had to work out what we were going to do the next day then rearrange the machinery so the appropriate pieces were at the front. We also had the chemical safe up there," said Nick.

The Tea Shed, named after the favourite beverage of the occupants, looked like an old stone bothy and boasted stone floors and ivy growing through the roof.

"We kept the Certes in there as well as racks of hand tools while it was also our Mess Room. It was very cold in the winter and heaven knows how many heaters we got through."

The Boat House was exactly what the name suggests as it is located on the edge of the attractive lake which runs through the middle of the course.

Obviously there is no real need for a boat house to be particularly water tight and, in this

case while extremely attractive with the sun streaming through it, protection from the elements was not its strong suit.

"This was where we kept the big stuff," explained Nick.

As well as the obvious complications, being split over three sites was not ideal from a logistical point of view.

"I cut fairways and it was a case of setting everyone up then going all the way down to the boat house to collect the equipment then going back up to cut the 1st and 3rd before golfers got out so it was about 20 minutes before I'd get any work done."

The catalyst for change came when the Navy's Establishment Safety Advisor, together with the Dryad's First Lieutenant in charge of all environmental and health and safety issues surrounding the base, visited to carry out an independent health and safety assessment on the team's working conditions.

#### What they saw caused them to take action.

"They said that it wasn't good. All our wet gear was always stored in the Tea Shed which was against health and safety regulations and we had no facilities for drying so we'd come in absolutely soaked and have other clothes dripping down on us and the stone floor."

Having looked at the situation and agreed that something would have to be done about it the Navy revealed that funds were available and that the club should make a bid for the money.

"We explained what we wanted to an architect who did the work and came up with a costing for the project.

Initially, the Navy rejected the plans because the plans didn't fit into the proposed budget so we did more work but were rejected again and it was only on the third attempt that we got approval - third time lucky," said Nick, who added that it took two and a half



Head Greenkeeper Nick Beadle (right) and Simon Berry inspect the course

years to finally secure the funding.

The key to the success was approaching the civilian builders, VJ Fleet and Sons who had built several of the stone built bridges on the course and who had been contracted to undertake the work, and ask what they could do for the money available - £144,000 from the Navy and £50,000 raised by the club itself, as in addition to being Southwick Park Naval Recreation Centre it is also Southwick Park Golf Club with civilian members.

"We already knew what we wanted - a mess room, drying room, office, workshop, storeroom and the main storage space and this is what we came up with," said Nick, adding that he'd be more than happy to talk with other greenkeepers who were looking at new facilities.

Prior to going ahead they did visit other clubs with new facilities and once they were happy with the final plans ground work began last June with the team moving in on November 1.

"We carried out the move ourselves and with the course being closed for a couple of months due to the flooding we were able to concentrate on making it happen. We had a skip down at the Boat House and were ruthless



about throwing things out - nuts and bolts, old tractor weights and wheels all went," he recalled.

The course itself is exceptionally busy with 40-50,000 rounds a year on a lay-out which only stretches to 100 acres.

"Not so long ago it used to be a mind boggling 70,000 rounds a year so you can imagine how busy it was then. When a ship comes into port we often get a party coming up for a game, although many of those who play are not regular golfers," said Nick, who arrived at the course in April '96.

Prior to his arrival a policy of replacing the existing push-up greens with sand based had been in place but Nick decided to spend more time on the existing greens instead.

"We had no aeration equipment when I arrived so we got hold of some and started scarifying and rapid coring, putting an aeration programme in place. The majority of the course is on clay which doesn't help and when they attempted to stop the flooding in Fareham they backed the water up to us, so we caught the brunt of it," explained Nick, whose contract states that he must attend BIGGA Golf Days and lectures.

One interesting feature of the course

is the fine bridge which spans the lake at one of its narrowest points - it was previously the disabled ramp at HMS Victory which is permanently berthed at Portsmouth.

The course does see its fair share of celebrities with the Royal Navy's most famous golfer, the Duke of York, playing a few rounds while he was stationed at HMS Dryad for a time.

HMS Dryad has a unique place in the country's history having been where Churchill, Eisenhower and Montgomery planned the D Day Landings and the three men used to adjourn to the village pub for a light refreshment after a long day's work.

"We've also had the Jim Davidson British Forces Foundation Day here with a whole lot of stars," said Nick, who, together with the team, has recently built some excellent new tees on the course.

The Course Management Centre is a fine example of what modern day maintenance facilities should be and Southwick Park Naval Recreation Centre has shown what can be done with a sensible budget. And those responsible have every right to look on with the the same pride as the Royal Navy would of a newly commissioned aircraft carrier.



Above: The beautiful lake at Southwick Park narrows to allow access across, via the old disabled ramp from HMS Victory (right)

