



Scott MacCallum travelled to Cheshire to meet Steve Hartshorn, Course Manager of Heyrose GC

# BLUEPRINT

## FOR A SUCCESSFUL CLUB



The boom in golf course construction in the late 80s early 90s saw many developers finish up with charred digits and empty pockets. But it didn't have to be that way.

Some course developers actually, and you may find this hard to believe, used the same business acumen in building their golf course as they did in the walk of life in which they had originally become successful. Remarkable I know.

Listed among those would be Eric Bridge and his son, Christopher, who founded and built Heyrose Golf Club in Knutsford, Cheshire, 12 years ago.

Using the "Walk before you Run" philosophy the family started out with nine holes, began attracting members, then extended to 18 hole before building a clubhouse.

Having then got as far as they could using their limited knowledge and

skills to manage the course they appointed a Course Manager, who moved the course on to the next level. Now the club has just finished rebuilding the first nine greens to a much higher specification than the, sensibly pitched, original funding had allowed.

It all means that Heyrose Golf Club has grown at a sensible rate and injected the investment when the foundations for a successful club were in place thus protecting itself from the vagaries of a volatile leisure industry sector.

The man who the Bridges installed to provide the greenkeeping know how is 40 year-old Steven Hartshorn, who has shown the benefits of having a specialist in post.

The great thing was that it was the owners themselves who had recognised the need for specialist help.





"I think they knew they'd gone as far as they could with the knowledge that they had and that they needed to employ a greenkeeper."

The first thing Steve did when he arrived was put work schedules in place including aeration programmes and good greenkeeping practices; work on the presentation of the course - the infamous landing strip style fairways were a feature - and put a programme in place to enlarge the tees.

"Prior to that work had been very intermittent. If they thought the greens were a bit long they'd cut them rather than having daily maintenance schedules while the bunkers were not

really up to standard and the course furniture was a little careworn."

He was given every support when he joined and what he asked for was made available to him.

"Even before I'd taken up the position they'd gone out and bought a John Deere compact tractor so it was waiting for me in the sheds when I started."

The Bridge family - Christopher looks after the club finances while his wife, Elizabeth, is the Club's General Manager - are particularly go ahead, while it was father, Eric, whose concept Heyrose Golf Club was.

"He had played golf for about 35 years and been Chairman of Green at Knutsford Golf Club and was very much a supporter of the greens staff but then told them that he'd rather go off and build his own course. And that's exactly what he did," recalled Steve.

The limitations in the existing greens construction became apparent to Steve fairly early on.

"The fines within the rootzone had slowly been working their way down and as Heyrose, like many courses built in the 80s, didn't use an intermediate blinding layer but instead had a geotextile membrane and the fines had moved down and blocked it."

Having made the decision that the greens had to be reconstructed, what





would have been a medium term plan possibly involving one green a year became slightly more urgent with the recent wet winters.

"Two years ago we decided to do the 11th, which was the worst green on the course. We had dug some holes out of the rootzone and poured 25 litre drums of water into the stone underneath and it was going so it was pretty obvious nothing was wrong with the drainage but that it was the rootzone that was the problem.

"It was indigenous soil mixed with sand and sand and clay makes bricks it doesn't make quality golf greens," said Steve.

He did receive a bit of a shock when the subject of who was going to design the new greens was talked about.

"They said 'You are.', So the many training courses he'd attended including Golf Course Design with Howard Swan and Simon Gidman at BTME became all the more valuable.

"I'd also picked up experience of building greens at Lingfield Golf Club and Chichester where I was involved in the growing in and where Pearson's were on site. I enjoy getting to know people and picking up tips and information."

The 11th was to be the only green to be done at that particular time so

Steve restrained from producing any outlandish design features.

"We didn't want to be too ambitious if it was going to be the only green we did so the design was relatively conservative," he explained.

The construction work was carried out to Steve's design specification by John Mallinson's, of Ormskirk, who were also involved in the construction work for Manchester's Commonwealth Games stadium.

"They were excellent, very professional, and the design specifications I laid down for them were followed exactly," said Steve.

It was decided that turfing would be the best option as it offered the opportunity to get the green back in play quicker and various samples were examined.

"We brought in a Rufford rootzone and chose Inturf for our turf, and they've been super. We did consider washed turf but opted instead for a quality turf in a sandy medium.

"We found the Edwards family to be brilliant. Whatever backup we've needed has been there and they are honest, in that they'd advise us to wait a couple of weeks if they felt the turf would be better then."

The new green was laid in January 2000 and opened for play at the beginning of June.

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"The root development was incredible. It was throwing roots down for fun and virtually overnight you could see a huge improvement in the quality of the green," he revealed.

Having seen this success, the decision was made to build four more in the autumn of the same year.

"But, as we know, that winter was awful and we couldn't get the machinery onto the course so we didn't start until February 2001 with the next four worst greens, the 10th, 12th, 13th and 17th earmarked."

And on this occasion Steve was able to give much fuller vent to his design flair.

"The greens were enlarged and two of them moved location with one of them, the 13th, pushed behind a pond which the owners had always wanted to bring into play but which had previously been 20 yards behind the green.

"I ensured that there was an alternative route to the green avoiding the pond and we had to clear the area of trees, scraggy alders and willows and clean out the pond but it turned a par-4 into a par-5, 87 yards longer than before."



"The 10th was also fundamentally changed, the 12th green was on the same site but the complex was completely changed while we introduced McKenzie swails into the 17th green.

The work was completed in early April and they opened for play at the end of June.

"It was very ambitious but because it was early spring we were again getting phenomenal root development - an inch per week, I've never seen turf throw down root like it - and the turf was coming in nice and thin with very little thatch in it."

The final four holes of the back nine - the first nine that was built - were started last October and finished in the final week of February.

"They are doing very well and it means that we have done the entire nine in two years which is great considering that we had envisaged doing one a year. The front nine greens are not as crucial as they do drain better. There are limitations and given the required finances they will be done but that doesn't need to be straight away.

Heyrose is a successful club - they have also just appointed former European Tour pro, Paul Affleck, to be their Club Professional -and a model for any new club wanting to develop from modest beginnings. In Steve Hartshorn and his five man team they have the expertise to continue that development.

**Equipment Inventory**

- Jacobsen Greensking IV
- John Deere 2243
- John Deere 2653A
- John Deere 6x4 Gator
- John Deere 670 Compact
- Jacobsen LF3810
- Huxley TR138 Gangs
- Ford 1910 Compact
- Ford TN55
- Kubota B2150 Compact
- Multicore TM1000
- Proseed
- Sisis Multitine
- Sisis Multislit
- Sisis Topspread
- Hardi BL200 Sprayer
- Amazone Groundkeeper
- Progressive TD 65-2 Trideck
- 2 Jacobsen 810 Express
- Saxon PM100
- Ransomes Supercertes
- Brouwer EY15D
- Husqvarna 232 Strimmer
- McColloch 3000 Strimmer
- McColloch Promac Strimmer
- Stihl BR400 Blower
- 2 Allen 218si
- McColloch 10-10 Chainsaw
- Stihl 039 Chainsaw
- Robin HT231 Hedgetrimmer
- Marston 3 Tonne Trailer
- Sisis HDS 32 F/Slit
- Major T7M Rotary
- Honda HRB535SXE
- Kubota F2400
- Honda HRD535
- Amazone EKS300
- Hunter Juno Grinder

