



The BIGGA Golf Expo
to be the most successful
Castlerock is yet another example of what the Irish do very well - golf courses and in Charlie Edgar it has a Head man who knows how to keep it looking its finest

KING OF THE CASTLE

Castlerock is a member of the fine stable of courses on the northerly coast of Ireland and as a result welcomes travelling golfers from all corners of the world.

And those who ensure an itinerary, which inevitably will include Royal Portrush and Portstewart, is also bolstered by Castlerock Golf Club, in County Londonderry, will invariably pat each other on the back and congratulate themselves for not having that extra Guinness the night before and booking a tee time instead.

When they arrive on the 1st tee of Castlerock, with their heads only slightly fuzzy, the challenge that faces them is more than enough to ensure that their senses are at their sharpest for the next four hours or so.

Charlie Edgar is Head man and a man who thoroughly enjoys the chal-

lenges which the 18 hole and nine hole courses throw up to him and his team.

The club enjoyed its centenary last year but having 100 years on the clock has not stopped amendments and refinements being carried out to the Castlerock courses.

The club decided that the main course needed some extra length if it were to be able to host professional events and Charlie was heavily involved in this work.

"We put in some new tees and reshaped three holes so there was different angles. On the 13th we actually moved the tee up and the new line has improved the hole no end. The new tee had originally been built 25 years ago but because the carry required from the tee was too difficult it hadn't been used for many years and had become overgrown.

"In this case the new technology has actually improved the hole rather than the reverse because the carry is makeable and becomes a real challenge," explained Charlie, who was previously Bernard Findlay's Deputy at Portstewart.

The bunkers now really stare you in the face," he added.

Those bunkers themselves have also come in for some attention at Castlerock having suffered for many years from erosion.

"When I started here a lot of erosion had taken place in the bunkers. The sides had begun to come in and they were just cut back and back until we had big wide open bunkers which were no good for keeping our dune sand in - the wind would just whip it out."

To remedy the situation the team has redone all the bunkers over the last six years retvetting them and making them into smaller pot bunkers.



Above: The estuary divides Castlerock from Portstewart where Charlie used to work

"We did the same job when I was working at Portstewart. They had big, wide open bunkers and Bernard (Findlay) instituted a rolling programme of reshaping and retvetting so that the bunkers would hold in the sand."

It was always the club's aim to do something with the bunkers but the basic design and shape was left to Charlie.

"Where we had one big bunker we'd maybe split it into three wee pot bunkers while some of them may have been very close to the aprons of the green with all the problems of sand splash so we'd bring them back. It helped us to give a little more definition around the greens," explained Charlie, who can now look with pride on 70 fine bunkers.

Some members want coarser grittier sand which had been brought in. "Thankfully I had enough members on my side who listened to me when I said that it's been that way for a hundred years and we would be mess-

ing with the ecosystem if we were to change it.

"That's the way it was when these courses were built - if they had a blow out they'd say that's a good place for a bunker - that's basically where the bunkers came from and at the present time most of the committee agree," explained Charlie.

"The men enjoy bunker restoration. It's different. You're never short of work on a links course because you can get on the greens 365 days a year."

Having carried out the work Charlie and his team can see the longer lasting benefits of the work they have done.

"Obviously with golfers hitting out of the sand we are always going back to the bunkers but we are more or less clearing back to the original soil face again so we have something to go back to rather than just being edged up and edged up."

While much of the work that Charlie has done since arriving at the

Below: Charlie outside one of the unusual shelters built on the course



KING OF THE CASTLE



Right: Attractive golfing country, to be sure!

Below: The Castlerock team has spent a lot of time on bunker renovation

club has been on the Championship Course he is also keen to make inroads into the nine holes as well.

"There is a world of work needing done to the nine which I'm really looking forward to doing. There are no bunkers on the nine but it doesn't really need them, it is lovely ground and very tight," he explained.

Ironically it is the highest point on the course which causes the Castlerock team the most problems.

"Our highest point is the 16th and for some reason the good Lord decided he would drop clay and stones on this hump and it affects five holes in total. The biggest problem it causes is in the bunkers in winter time which

can get very hard and don't have drainage."

Speaking with Charlie you very much get the impression that here is a man who knows what he is doing, and what's more, is good at it. He has an upbeat personality and you can easily tell why he is a former Irish Young Greenkeeper of the Year.

"Links courses are a kind of day-to-day thing. I walk around the course at least twice a week just checking things and I can see if it looks hungry and needs a feed. If it looks fine I just leave it alone ... get away from this green image.

"It is all about the simple things like fertilising, bunker maintenance, aer-

ation and spiking. I enjoy watching The Open now as that's the way they should be. As far as links courses are concerned you have to be natural. If they are green it is because it has happened naturally," he said.

Charlie was 19 before he got into greenkeeping. When he left school he started at the local council bowling green before a job came up as a trainee greenkeeper at Portstewart.

"I actually took a pay cut to go to Portstewart but it was well worth it - training and education was not a problem.

"I learned a lot about fertiliser regimes and what grasses needed at Portstewart and came to learn that the simplest one was the best. You can't go too far wrong when you are using the likes of sulphate of ammonia, potash and iron. You can get caught up in a lot of new fangled nonsense as far as these slow release fertilisers which claim to be a solution in a bag," said Charlie who has also worked hard on improving the definition on the golf courses.

Charlie showed himself to be a man of potential at Portstewart and was quickly promoted to Deputy.

"I showed I was willing to learn and they showed that they were willing to put me on

courses. I learned so much from the older guys by watching how they did things," he explained.

He also picked up many management skills from Bernard Findlay which have stood him in good stead since his move to Castlerock, which although it is a few miles by car from Portstewart is only a short distance by boat.

"Bernard had a particular style of management. Nothing was left to chance. He was always well prepared and he'd always done his homework. When you did a job everything was there when you needed it to be there and if there was a possibility that something might happen a contingency plan was there to cover it.

"Budgeting was another thing I learned and putting jobs out to tender. It used to be you'd go with who you had the best relationship with but now committees are putting more pressure on to find the best price and you may have to get three prices for every job," said Charlie, who honed many of his management skills on BIGGA's Supervisory Management Courses at Aldwark Manor.

"I did the first week when I was still at Portstewart and when I came for this job I said I wanted to carry on and do the other weeks as well. It was very beneficial and I really enjoyed it."

It is that word "enjoy" which seems to come to the fore at Castlerock. Charlie Edgar and his team enjoy preparing the course for its members and guests while those who play it certainly enjoy the challenge.

