

Course Feature



▲ Bill Payne

Glorious Goodwood

Scott MacCallum travelled south to meet Bill Payne, The Goodwood Club's Course Manager, a man with a lot to be happy about.

Bump into Bill Payne, Course Manager at The Goodwood Club, in Sussex, at the moment and there is a fair chance you'll notice either his Cheshire Cat-like grin or his two tails. If he also looks a little taller than you remember him perhaps it's because, if you look closely, you can see that he's walking on air.

Indeed, you wouldn't need to be Sherlock Holmes to spot that Bill is a fairly happy chap at the moment. The reason?

Well, the course is currently undergoing a complete make-over and having a serious amount of money spent on it. There are six brand new holes, a complete set of new greens, tee, fairway and bunker renovation and a new irrigation system to boot and while Bill is enjoying being a key man in the renovation process he can't wait to get his new improved course back so he can begin looking after it on behalf of the Goodwood membership.

"This is like having all your Christmas presents at once," said Bill, who also threw into the conversation that he had a complete set of new machinery and a new state-of-the-art maintenance facility.

The catalyst for Bill's current state of euphoria was the return of the golf course to the responsibility of the Earl of March at the end of its lease to Goodwood Golf Club Limited. The Earl took the decision to bring the golf course back into the fold of the Goodwood Estate which encompasses Goodwood House and its Park which holds the annual Festival of Speed; the famous Goodwood Racecourse, home of 'Glorious Goodwood' every July; Goodwood Aerodrome, and the Motor Circuit, which hosts the Goodwood Revival each year. One of the more progressive thinking of the country's landed aristocracy, Lord March had a plan to create a unique leisure concept in an area already rich in tourist potential and the golf course fitted the plan superbly.

"It is Lord March's aim to raise the profile of the course and to make it the best downland golf course in the country. And it will be," said Bill, as he showed me around... oh yes, in his new company 4x4.

Bill has been at Goodwood for eight years and did feel that the course was in need of some investment.

"Being a 100 year old course it had been ticking along as old courses do. The irrigation had been in for 35 years and the members felt it would probably be there for another 35 years. A new mower would be purchased only when the old one had literally fallen apart!" recalled Bill.

That all changed when he was called to a meeting about two years ago and told of the plans for the course but he certainly didn't suspect that the transformation would be quite as dramatic as it has proven to be.

"I thought we might redesign half a dozen holes but the scale of the development became apparent during a series of presentations which were made to the existing membership of the club."

Howard Swan was the man chosen to undertake the design work and his plans have transformed the course.

"What the members have seen has made it much easier for them to swallow the bitter pill of disruption to their golf at the moment. They come up to me and say 'Bill, have you seen the new green on the 18th' or 'The new 2nd looks tremendous'."

One of the main challenges for Howard was the fact that the course was split by a very busy road. The car park is on one side of the road, as is the 1st hole and the bulk of the course, and the closing holes on the Clubhouse side. Bill's maintenance facility is currently on the same side as the Clubhouse.

"Every bit of kit has to be registered for the road, have a beacon and full lighting on it and be taxed which is a major headache while the health and safety concerns are considerable.

John Greasley

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▲ It is a wonderful setting, note the race course in the top right

"That will be resolved with the rerouting of the course and the installation of a tunnel which will be wide enough for our machines."

The construction work has been carried out by John Greasley with the irrigation being installed at the same time by TIS (Scotland) Limited. The Leicester-based Greasley team and the Scottish-based irrigation installers live locally and work a fortnight on and a weekend off.

The irrigation system was designed by Bill Hawthorn, of 2iC, and he has also designed the irrigation for the rest of the Estate, a mammoth project bearing in mind the demands placed on it by the Racecourse and the huge numbers who attend the horse and motor racing events during the year. 2iC also undertook a GPS survey of the existing course, to provide accurate plans and elevations to Swan Golf Designs, and will update this for the new layout, including the new irrigation system, once all works are complete.

The course's system uses gravity rather than a pump and runs from a 200 cubic metre tank on top of the Trundle Hill and Bill has nothing but praise for it, as he does for the work of both the Greasley and TIS (Scotland) contractors.

"Both teams have been absolutely superb. I think they're getting on with it as they want to go home," he joked, as we watched a shaper expertly filling in a narrow drainage ditch in one of the new greens.

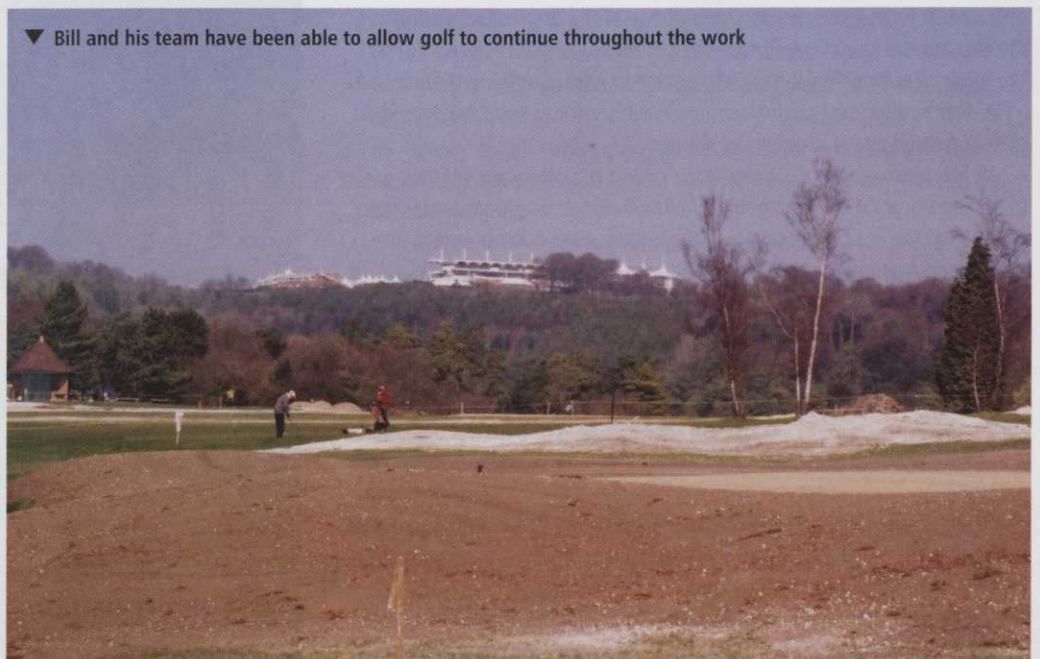
Bill works closely with Club Secretary, Stephanie Sherlock, Trevor

Michie, Greasley's Project Manager, and Neil Porteous, of TIS (Scotland), who all sit down every Tuesday and plan the week ahead.

"That in itself is a major operation as the biggest challenge has been to keep people playing golf.

"As you can imagine my diary has been stuffed with notes saying which hole is shutting and where we need to put in temporaries. Right at the beginning we had an overall Plan A which I worked out with my Deputy, Steve Smees, showing where we would be putting temps but, of course, what happens? There is a new bunker going in there or an irrigation pipe so you can never be too sure what's going to happen," said Bill.

▼ Bill and his team have been able to allow golf to continue throughout the work





▲ A John Greasley shaper shows some great control

In fact they put two temps on to each hole so for example they have 13A and 13B and 14A and 14B .

"It means that we can shut down two holes completely and bring in, for example 13B."

But with the co-operation of the membership it has worked out well.

"We had to shut part of the 4th to allow fairway irrigation to go in.

There was an open trench and we had to get the golfers to go round one half one day, fill it in and turf it and then let them go round the other way the next day. In fairness TIS are used to working that way."

The total work project amounts to six complete new holes - the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 16th, 17th and 18th while the rest of the holes have resculpted fairways, new tees, three or four times the size of the originals, and every green rebuilt .

"The greens are all re-designed and re-constructed with new drainage systems while we've also got 77 new bunkers. It's fairly major work," he said, with a degree of understatement.

The course has always drained well and golf is genuinely a 365 day a year pursuit while Bill and his team are getting ready to the challenge of maintaining the course to a standard befitting the work that is being carried out and expected by anything which carries The Goodwood Club label.

Goodwood is an extremely interesting site in more ways than one. Not only does it have some superb views of one of the prettiest race courses in the country it is also of significant archaeological importance and during the work an archaeologist has been on site to ensure nothing is damaged.

A deer herding compound from ancient history has been uncovered on the course and as Bill is quick to point out,

"It has always been a nice walk but now it is a nice walk which is going to be a really good game of golf as well with excellent greens and superb bunkering. The old bunkers were in the wrong place and the wrong size and even I could hit over them," he admitted.

Goodwood also boasts a fine golfing history having been originally designed by James Braid and being the venue for Bobby Locke's first ever European game of golf. Apparently, if the plaque on the Clubhouse wall is to be believed, his opening tee shot was nothing to write home to South Africa about.

Listening to him you can't help but be carried away by his enthusiasm and drive.

"How could you not be driven by something like this. I've found myself drawing on new skills I didn't know I had in me. It's been the best thing, it really has. I was definitely more hands on before but now I've taught myself computer skills and emailing while my record keeping is much more accurate," said Bill, who now attends meetings with the other Goodwood



▲ All the greens have been redesigned and rebuilt

Estate managers instead of a traditional Green Committee.

"There are over 200 people working on the Estate. I will soon have a staff of seven and am enjoying being part of a larger, professional team. I'm about to give a Powerpoint presentation on the progress of the work to the other managers."

I'm sure that if the enthusiasm he showed during my visit is replicated during his presentation he will have even the non-golfing Goodwood managers itching to get out onto the course.

▼ The new tees will make a huge difference

