

# FLAG THIEVES STEAL OVER 500

Melissa Toombs talks to Bulwell Forest Club Secretary, John Bush

**An unlikely target for burglars, Bulwell Forest Golf Club has seen over 500 flags vanish from its course during 2007.**

John has been a member of Bulwell Forest, the oldest golf club in Nottingham, for 20 years and told me that disappearing flags have always been a problem. "It's got to the stage where we are buying cheaper flags and saving the best ones for special occasions," said Club Secretary, John Bush. "We used to be a municipal course and government workers used to collect the flags at night, however, when we entered into employment of our own, we decided to start leaving the flags out during the evening as members had complained that they had no flags to play to."

This created a tricky situation for the Club, as two or three flags started to go missing each night. Comparing the monetary loss of the theft of two or three flags to paying a greenkeeper to come back at night and pack the flags away, the latter still proved more costly for the Club.

"Over the last few months the problem has increased 10 fold," explained John, "We are losing a dozen or more flags each night."

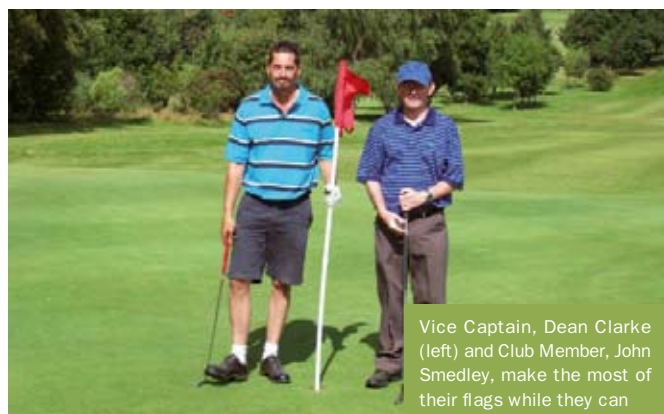
The Club believes one of the sources is dogs. People walk their dogs over the course at night and the animal lifts the pin out of the hole and chews the flag.

"We tried confronting the individuals involved on several occasions and for a time, the number of stolen flags dropped, but this was only ever temporary," said a rather frustrated Club Secretary.

Bulwell Forest, where golf has been played since the 1870s, is in the unfortunate position of having a footpath running across its course, which many children cross coming home from school - this is another time of day when flags tend to go missing.

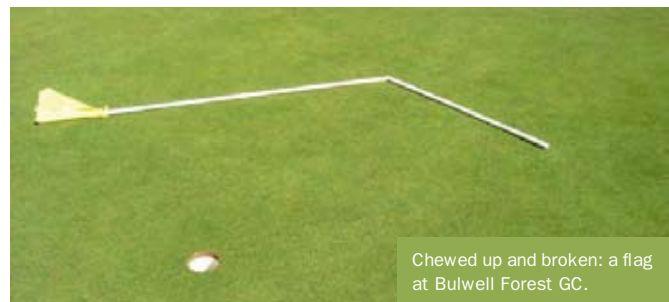
"We can't imagine what particular use the flags could be put to. We often find them broken around the course and wonder if people used the old, more expensive, slender flag poles around the garden," said John.

After six break-ins in a fortnight, security at the heathland course has been strengthened with alarms and the Catering Manager is now living on the premises.



Vice Captain, Dean Clarke (left) and Club Member, John Smedley, make the most of their flags while they can

The course itself is situated in the middle of Nottingham city and is surrounded on three sides by large housing estates. Two public footpaths also run across the course, and although the course is fenced in many areas - along the roadside and southern sides of the course - it is still impossible for the staff at Bulwell to stop the public from cutting across their course.



Chewed up and broken: a flag at Bulwell Forest GC.

"We are looking in to having security patrol the course at night, but this is obviously linked with the expense of having to pay a security person for three or four hours work a night. The cost of their wages in comparison to cost of the flags being stolen doesn't prove to be cost effective for the Club," explained the Secretary.

There really doesn't seem to be an easy answer to the problems this Club is facing. A certain amount of trust is involved when flags are left out, "It's a case of how much money can you afford to spend on this - Do you simply have to sit back and accept the fact that it's just going to continue happening?" said John Bush.

"We've reported the incidents on numerous occasions and unfortunately it seems the issue if a bit too small fry for the local Police."

The Club has installed CCTV within the Clubhouse but the cost of installing this out on the 18 hole course would be immense and problematic, what with having to lay out a power line.

The Club currently has flags out on the course which are used in the plumbing trade - This seems like the only way to try and save money, as they only cost around £2 each.

The Club has lost around £1200 worth of flags within the last year.

"We just need to find someone willing to donate 600 flags a year," said John, trying to remain upbeat about the situation.

## SECURITY STATS

Trends in the British Crime Survey, Incidents of Crime:

- **Burglary with Entry - down 50% from 1997 to 2006/07**
- **Burglary Attempts - down 61% from 1997 to 2006/07**
- **Theft of Vehicles - down 53% from 1997 to 2006/07**
- **Attempts Of and From Vehicles - down 59% from 1997 to 2006/07**