



Rockliffe Hall's Davy Cuthbertson talks with Charles de Haan about the role of the Course Manager in golf course signage.

“Get involved with your club’s choice of signage!”

Signage has become one of the most significant ways in which the presentation of a golf course can be improved, and with the ‘flight to quality’ now a major trend in the golf club market, signage is an investment decision well worth getting right.

Yet many clubs and courses assume that the decision as to what type or design of course signage belongs to the club’s owners or committees. While understandable from a purely financial perspective, the one person who knows the course and its environment best is the Course Manager or Head Greenkeeper. Combine that knowledge with the responsibility for the signage’s maintenance and a Course Manager is ideally placed to decide, influence or advise on the signage design, type and choice of materials.

Rockliffe Hall

Davy Cuthbertson is the Course and Estate Manager at the recently completed Rockliffe Hall golf course, and has been overseeing the new championship course’s growing-in since January 2008. Familiar with

every aspect and detail of all the grasses and their colourings, the overall environment of the course, and the weather conditions the course and its furniture will have to face, Davy made it part of his job to get involved with – in fact, initiate – the choice of signage design for Rockliffe Hall.

His choice was influenced by his experience at Slaley Hall, his previous posting. Out on the course, bronze had been used on dry stone plinths which Davy felt blended well with the colourings and the course environment at Slaley Hall. While Rockliffe Hall is a parkland course, the fairway grasses are a mixture of bents, fescues and rye that tend to be typically grass green in colour throughout the season, whereas the mixture for the roughs is a wild fescue which goes a brownish yellow through the main part of the season.

With that in mind, Davy also wanted a material that was going to last for a very long time, and be very easy for his team to clean and maintain.

Davy’s other concern was to get his team of 12 greenkeepers on board.

“They are the ones who are going

to have to look after all the course signage, and I wanted their input and opinions as much as the chaps who’d be signing the cheques. I needed to make sure they took a pride in every aspect of the course we’d been given the responsibility for turning into one of the UK’s finest.”

Set the brief, involve the decision makers – and get the greenkeeping team’s buy-in

Davy started by taking some of Rockliffe Hall’s decision makers and greenkeepers to Harrogate Week last January to see what was on offer from the signage companies. This enabled Davy, and the chaps signing off the cheques, to get a good idea of each of the companies; having set a brief outlining what he wanted and the overall specifications for the designs, numbers of each item, and so on, Davy then got proposals from three selected companies.

Choosing the design

Having looked at all sorts of different signage possibilities, Davy eventually elected for bronze for the signage figures and plaques, and





sandstone on which to mount the dark colouring of the bronze items. But Davy didn't stop there.

"I also wanted a design that would stand out, quite literally, so rather than low level plinths or boulders, I persuaded the directors to go for taller (4' above ground, 1.5' below in a cement footing) sandstone monoliths to be used for the tee signage, with a bronze plaque mounted on the stone carrying a diagram of the hole and all the relevant hole information for each main tee position, ie. white, yellow, red, black and gold. It turned out to be a good decision, because their height is a very distinctive feature around the course, and they are both easy to see and yet blend really well with the environmental colourings."

Fixing the design

Through a process of presentations and further discussions, some bronze samples were provided by one of the companies, Eagle, to demonstrate the quality, durability and impermeability of the detailing that could be achieved using cast 'penny' bronze. With Eagle's help, the resulting design of the hole information for each of the bronze plaques was innovative, as it comprised:

- the hole number
- five sets of yardages and their respective tee colourings
- a painted, infilled black background
- par and stroke index
- the Rockliffe Hall logostyle and symbol in bronze out of the black background
- a diagram of each hole and its major hazards.

The next challenge was finding a source for the sandstone monoliths, and Davy had soon tracked down a quarry near Leeds that could provide and deliver just what he wanted. As each monolith was going to be stacked in a prominent position at the beginning of each hole, Davy also created a simple 3' circle of sandstone gravel as the base of each monolith. This would be simple to keep weed and grass free, while also being easy to mow around.

Maintenance: designed to easy, minimal

Based on Davy's experience of different types of signage materials, the maintenance is very simple, as Davy explained

"Bronze is more expensive than zinc or other bases, but it is a 'forever' product – it's virtually impossible to damage or scratch it, and it only needs a wipe with a damp cloth to remove dust or bird mess. It's also possible to refurbish the bronze in the future. The sandstone is the same: it lasts forever, it doesn't need any cleaning attention as such, and the gravel surrounds are designed for minimal maintenance as well. The mow-overs in the tees are the same, being bronze set in sandstone mounts.

"Now it's all been installed, with all the sandstone monoliths, the mow-overs on each tee, the point of play markers and so on, my original vision for all the finishing touches at Rockliffe Hall has become a reality, and I'm glad to say that there's been a lot of praise for the overall presentation of the course. Eagle's input throughout, from design to



delivery, has been very useful, and the signage really looks the part. In the opinion of all those involved, the extra cost of going for bronze on sandstone has really paid off. It's worth it for the image and impressions it creates, and as an upmarket golfing destination, for Rockliffe Hall that's essential."

Advice to other greenkeepers

Davy's advice is very straightforward.

"Get involved with your club's choice of signage! It's an essential part of the course and as a finishing touch, presentation is the greenkeeper's responsibility. With your knowledge of the course and its environment, you should be the one person the club can trust with design, material and maintenance issues, so don't wait for them to make the decision – get involved!"

