

Back in time

The Open at Royal Lytham & St Annes Special

Boasting ten Open Championships and two Ryder Cups, Royal Lytham and St Annes Golf Club, has a quite prestigious past. Paul Smith delves through the archives to offer us some memorable Open moments, historical accounts and anecdotes through the course's colourful ages

In 1886, Royal Lytham and St. Annes Golf Club was founded and in 1897, the present course was built. Ten Open Championships have been played on the links, as well as two Ryder Cups.

To run alongside our Open preview this month, Royal Lytham and St. Annes' Head Greenkeeper, Paul Smith, delves back through the archives to offer us some memorable Open moments, historical accounts and anecdotes through the course's colourful ages.

Greenkeepers Past

It is a good thing if one can maintain a good sense of humour and have a good outlook on life; these attributes serve you well in greenkeeping which is likely to help you to achieve success in your chosen career. I am sure that we can all relate to some humorous account or incident in the line of our work.

In 1907 John Barnes was dismissed after 19 years of loyal service. He developed a habit of saying he was going down to the 9th hole, when in fact he nipped over to the Fairhaven Hotel across the railway. Back on the course one day he was found rather the worse for wear by a member.

Jim Marshall the Head Greenkeeper appointed in 1948, an outspoken and able Scot, moved a hole immediately before a member of the council played his difficult approach shot. The member complained that golf was hard enough without having a moving target, which Jim replied: "You shouldn't get up so b***** early in the morning". He almost resigned in 1949 when the senior club officials of the Bunker Committee had a running



battle building and removing drive bunker.

For the 1963 Open several members of the Open Championship Committee were out with Jim deciding where best to place the holes. At the 9th Jim said the gentlemen could mark where they pleased, but he knew the greens best and the holes would be placed where he chose.

Jim was succeeded by Leslie Beetham a man with his own mind. During a course inspection with the committee the captain mentioned that there were problems with various pests on the course. A man of few words Leslie replied the biggest pests were the members themselves. When he planted some trees on course they appeared to be in poor shape: in fact, a doctor pronounced them dead. Subsequently when they blossomed forth, Leslie



MAIN ABOVE: The halcyon days of greenkeeping, and a bloom of colour in the rough

AND INSET: Legend, Gary Player, helping the team out

said with a wry smile, he hoped he was more successful with his diagnosis of his patients.

Jimmy A. MacDonald MBE was my predecessor and worked as Head Greenkeeper for 26 years.

He was a charismatic, friendly and fun character always with a story to tell.

However, he landed himself in some serious trouble with Mrs



LEFT: Jimmy MacDonald: not a friend of the stimp meter!



MacDonald when he was quoted as saying that: "Lytham St. Annes was not the most beautiful of courses but it's not always the prettiest of woman that make the best wives".

He also had a hatred for the stimp meter and when an inquisitive member of the greenstaff sneaked one out on the course he was caught red handed and made to feel like Judas.

A Historical Account

Hours of work have changed little since 1893. Lowe, the course architect, worked alongside eight men, starting at 7am, stopping for breakfast at 9-9:30 and dinner at 12-1. Knocking off time was 5:30pm for the men, and 5pm for the horses.

Work records included carting, lopping, scrub cutting (which we are still on with), thatching hay stacks, forking (now verti draining) and ploughing (now rotavating).

Making bunkers (which we are still on with today but have managed to reduce the numbers from 365 to 203), rolling (which from time to time we still do). Planting star grass, Lyme grass, making greens and tees, r兔biting, tree planting (many undesirable species we have removed), r兔biting riddling and unfortunately sweeping lime, "Oh dear".

Memorable Open Moments

There was no easy round for Bobby Jones when he went onto win the 1926 Open.

He made a remarkable recovery shot with trouble all the way to the green, with a 175 yard carry at the 17th after he had pulled his drive into sandy wastes.

This moment of brilliance during the final round was the shot that won this legend the 1926 Open Championship.

Bernard Darwin was quoted as saying:

"A teaspoon more sand would have meant irretrievable ruin". Such are the margins between winning and losing in elite sport.

In 1969 Tony Jacklin's win was significant after so many years of overseas domination.

Ballesteros hooked left and sliced right; his ball dipped and detoured through sand and scrub venturing into unseen corners of the course including the occasional car park.

He executed some of the most memorable recovery shots in Open history and had the charisma that matched his style of play.

It is certainly true that he was the People's Champion and that his career was defined not only by what he won, but how he won.

Royal Lytham & St Annes Inventory over the years

Here is an account of the materials and machinery itemised in the club's historical accounts

- W Woodcock Joiner: Making stable harness racks
- W Towler saddle and harness maker: Harnesses and mowing boots
- Nixon Bros: Shoeing the horses and repairing mowers
- T.O Richardson Veterinary surgeon - powders for horses and rasping teeth
- David Shaw & Co Manchester Sheep dip and manure manufacturers: 15 trucks of ground shoddy
- Phoenix Mill two tonne of basic slag phosphate manure
- Sheppey Glue and Chemical Works Sheerness slug destroyer
- T Braddell & Son Belfast 18 patent golf holes
- Dickson, Brown & Tait Finest mixture of the finest grasses and clover (and the odd bag or two I suspect of the coarse stuff!)
- W.Thompson, Seedman of Ipswich - Lotus Comiculatus Trifolium, Thymus, Serpyllium. These plants all have modest water requirements, tolerating dry conditions in poor soils and can survive harsh conditions. Some of which are low and prostrate in growth habit and can tolerate pedestrian traffic (perhaps these can be reintroduced?)

On the 9th December 1896 P.Sebire et Ses Fils, Horticulteurs-Pepinieristes of Ussy, (Calvados) France the following trees:

- 4,000 Canadian Poplar - 3 years
- 4,000 Italian Black Poplar - 3 years
- 1,000 Japanese Green Spindle trees - 3 years - none of these trees survived

Leech bros Manchester ironmonger's cricket roller and pump

- T Jackson Singleton Blacksmith new cart
- Alex Shanks & Son Arbroath 36" horse lawn mower
- J & H Keyworth Liverpool 20" Excelsior lawnmower
- J Bellamy Millwall 100 gallon cistern

Drainage was laid inland except from the 3rd and 4th fairways, where at the clubs expense, the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway constructed a drain under the line for an annual rental of 5/-

Grazing rights produced £30 p.a, while the sale of rabbits provided a further source of income £18.7s 4d in 1896

The Lancashire Steam Motor Company of Leyland sent a Sumner steam lawnmower with roller and fire pump combined, together with a man to work it, on a 14 day trial in September 1897

Amongst the advantages listed were:

- Costs only 1d per brake horse power per hour when at work, and no expense for grooming and keeping when not at work
- One man or youth can work a two man machine with steam power and do double the amount of work
- No damage to borders, no marks left by horses, no boots to buy
- No slipping of the rollers (a constant source of evil with horse machines)

The price of the mower was £75

The cost of laying out the links and buying the equipment was £2,500 of which £400 was for rental for 4 years and £1,000 for wages

During the war the ladies Links was ploughed up for crops and allotment holders were permitted to use