

# A day in the life

Six months after his first greenkeeping crash course in Cheshire, Steve Castle joined the team at Immingham Golf Club the day before a major event with hundreds due to attend. What could possibly go wrong?





## PROFILE

**Name:** Steve Beverly  
**Position:** Head Greenkeeper  
**Born:** Wirral, 20 July 1979  
**Handicap:** 13  
**Hobbies:** Golf, spending time with wife and two young children  
**Favourite sports team:** Tranmere Rovers

**Back in November I experienced my first proper day in the life of a greenkeeper at Lymm Golf Club which featured digging drainage trenches in torrential rain – so I was extremely pleased to see the sun shining brightly as I headed for Immingham Golf Club, near Grimsby in Lincolnshire.**

The club's four greenkeepers – Steve Beverly, Robin Portess, Rob Bemment and Malcolm Holden – arrived well before I turned up at 7am to continue preparations for the next day's Charity Golf Day, with 130 people expected to play.

My first impression was that the parkland course – which opened in 1975 as a nine-hole venue before being extended to 18 holes in 1985 – genuinely looked superb, taking on a vibrant green hue in the sunshine.

However, I quickly discovered there was still much hard work to complete behind the scenes to fine-tune the course ahead of one of its most important days of the season.

Head Greenkeeper Steve said: "It's vital to have the course looking its absolute best. As well as the money that will be brought in tomorrow, we want to convince some of the players to return and ultimately to become members. It's all about word of mouth, if they tell people they've enjoyed it and it's a

first-class course more and more people will come and play here."

It would be no exaggeration to say the club exists on a shoestring budget, and have had to deal with problems ranging from disastrous floods to vandalism. It's been a challenging time for Scouser Steve who joined the club from Cleethorpes Golf Club (where he was Deputy Head Greenkeeper) in 2006.

"In June 2007 this area suffered horrendous flooding. We had 331mm of rain that month, to put that in context the next highest since I arrived was 154mm in June last year. Part of the course is below sea level and that flooded very badly, and it's clay-based so the water had nowhere to go. Everyone described it as a once-in-a-lifetime month, I just hope they're right!"

My first task was to help Steve empty the bins and ball washers next to the tees, and we began just yards from the impressive clubhouse. He then paused to point out a strange track running through a bunker. I was bemused until he wearily explained the cause.

"Someone's cycled through this. We've really suffered with vandalism. We've had flags stolen or chucked in the pond and greens dug up – but what can you do? We have CCTV, but we can't put a huge fence around the entire course. We just have to deal with it when it happens."

ABOVE: The team: Robin Portess, Malcolm Holden, Rob Bemment, Steve Beverly

As we worked our way around the course he showed me how to trim the holes – exactly the sort of task I did not appreciate as a casual golfer before I joined BIGGA but am now well aware of. It was clear attention to detail was absolutely vital as the club sought to convince many of the next day's punters to return.

This brought us on to the inevitably thorny issue of money in an area which is one of the least prosperous in the UK.

**“Machines are expensive to buy new so generally we all muck in and repair them when something breaks”**

Steve confided that the team had to take a pay cut at the height of the club's financial problems in 2010, and the newest machine the club owns is a five-year-old Toro Groundsmaster 7210. He added: "You have to balance out the cost of continually repairing against the cost of new machinery. These machines are expensive to buy new so generally we all muck in and repair them when something breaks."

After lunch in the shipping container which doubles as a mess room, Steve risked letting me loose

on parts of the course. I attempted to mow the 18th green with a Ransomes Jacobsen Greens King 6, but sadly

I failed to lift the mower up quickly enough and took a bite out of the side of the green – something I stupidly replicated later on a tee box. I've definitely still got some way to go in my greenkeeping education.

My favourite machine was the Toro Groundsmaster 7210. It's controlled with an unusual (to me) pair of hand-held levers. This took a little bit of time to adjust to, but within a few minutes I was confidently driving it around and having more fun than was strictly necessary.

Later, Steve and I spent much of the day painstakingly raking the club's 44 bunkers. He showed me the correct technique – and also showed me how to take the soil temperature, something he does every day – before he continued on the financial theme.

He said: "At BTME I heard a greenkeeper say he'd spent £7,000 on a single bunker. That's fair enough if you've got the money but that's a different world to us. Sustainability is all very well. But we haven't got years to implement it, plus, of course, it all costs money.

We're proving here that you don't need a massive budget to create a great course."

The team have a genuine affection for the club and each other. At 3pm, you might have expected them to have sprinted off home after another tough day, but in fact the opposite was true. Robin quickly got some practice in on the putting green (the whole team are very keen golfers with low handicaps) and we then headed for a well earned drink in the clubhouse.

A couple of members were very keen to praise the course despite the harsh economic realities. Comments included "it looks and plays fantastic", "these lads are doing a great job" and "it's the best course in the area". I've been made well aware that BIGGA members feel their tireless work is sometimes



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Ganton Golf Club,  
Yorkshire

**AERATION PROGRAMME**

Steve says: "We have two 'maintenance weeks' when aeration and heavier top dressing is carried out, with routine aeration regularly carried out throughout the year.

"The greens maintain slightly higher levels of thatch than we'd ideally like so a mixture of hollow coring, solid tining and verti-draining is carried out.

"The greens are solid tined at 3-4 week intervals depending on the golf calendar using a mixture of 8mm and 14mm tines at varying depths. They are fed using granular fertilisers from spring to autumn and liquids in winter. We use lawn sand in the spring, 12-0-9 in summer and 3-0-22 in the autumn. We're trialling two different types of bio-stimulants which comprise sugars and seaweeds amongst other elements.

"We've reduced fairway verti-draining due to the high cost of fuel, and fairway scarification is required but unfortunately is not financially viable."

**MACHINERY LIST**

Jacobsen Greens King 6  
 Jacobsen G-Plex 2 fitted with 2002 thatchaway units  
 Jacobsen LF3800  
 Jacobsen TR3  
 Kubota 5240 tractor  
 TYM 390 tractor with loader  
 Toro Workman 3300  
 Toro Groundsmaster 7210  
 Dakota 410 topdresser  
 John Deere 220 handmower  
 Hardi 200 litre sprayer  
 Charterhouse 7416 verti-drain  
 Turfmec 360 tractor mounted blower  
 1x Knapsack sprayer  
 1x flymo  
 1x backpack blower  
 2x trimmers

MAIN LEFT: Steve Beverly changing the ball wash  
 INSET LEFT: Steve Castle trimming the hole



unappreciated by many golfers at their clubs, so it was refreshing to hear this positivity. The only complaint I heard was that Immingham – with its tough par threes and fours, some blind tee shots and undulating fairways – was too hard!

Steve says: "It is a tough course and probably doesn't get the credit it deserves. Like any course if you take care with your course management - and hit it down the middle - you won't end up in trouble!"

I then noticed that a window on the second floor of the clubhouse was being repaired. I feared another

sad tale of mindless vandalism until Robin started laughing, and tried to explain how one visiting golfer had managed to whack a ball through it while practising in a net far below.

He said: "He must have accidentally hit it back off the iron frame, it's sailed just past his head, shot 20 feet up and gone through the window. It was like CSI Immingham the next day with us all trying to work out how he'd done it."

All in all, a hugely enjoyable and informative day and I left knowing I'd discovered a hidden gem of a club.

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