



Woolley Park
GOLF CLUB

PLEASE
REPAIR
PITCHM

A family affair at Woolley Park

Phil Rowbottom combines running a busy farm with managing a proprietary golf club at Woolley Park near Wakefield. Steve Castle spoke to him to discover how closely the two work together

Profile

Name: Phil Rowbottom.....
Position: Course Manager/
 Farmer.....
Born: Wakefield, 13 February
 1960
Handicap: 12
Hobbies: Clay pigeon shooting
 (Has won a gold medal for
 Great Britain in the World
 Championships)

I arrived at Woolley Park on a grey April day, but with the course, clubhouse and farm buzzing with activity. After some thought, Phil gave his job title as “Course Manager and Farmer” but it’s immediately clear that everyone gets involved in both sides of the business.

Phil explained: “No-one here is just a greenkeeper or just a farmer. There’s a couple of the greenkeepers out of the five staff we have who don’t do a lot of farming but they’ll

muck in when needed. One of them rolls all the corn when we sow it in the autumn. My colleagues Andy Scaman and Richard Thompson came through the farming industry with me. Richard is a farmer’s son who wanted to work on a larger farm, so he came here twenty-odd years ago. He’s vertidrainning today. Myself, my son John and Andy are the key farm staff and the others – Stuart Mason and Peter Colley - help out.

“Farm hands are a very adaptable group. They’re happy to drive a

small mower or a large tractor and they can generally mend things, and Andy and Richard achieved their NVQ2 Greenkeeping at Myerscough.”

The farm’s main function now is drying and storing grain for merchants and local farmers.

This started 25 years ago when father and son built a new grain store.

It turned out to be too big for their requirements, so they stored some oil seed rape as a favour for a neighbour and it grew from there.

Two years ago they constructed another grain plant and 9000 tons of grain went through the drier there last year.

Phil’s grandfather was a tenant at Mount Farm on the site, which lies close to the M1 in Wakefield. His late father David bought the farm in the mid seventies, and after years as a successful crop farm, David then made a decision which initially seemed surprising.

“Around 1992 my dad decided to build a parkland golf course. He didn’t play golf but the sport really was booming at that time.

“We had 150 acres of farmland which we earmarked for building the course. You have to bear in mind that none of the family knew the first thing about golf course construction. I’d studied Agriculture at college but had no real interest in golf.

“We had a friend who was an architect, so we talked to him about planning. Before we knew it we’d bought £12,000 of grass seed to sow it all down and we got stuck in. When you looked at the landscape, it was actually perfect.

“We didn’t need to excavate or move any trees, we just got on with planting grass seed. We tried not to overcomplicate things and that’s the attitude we try and retain today where possible.

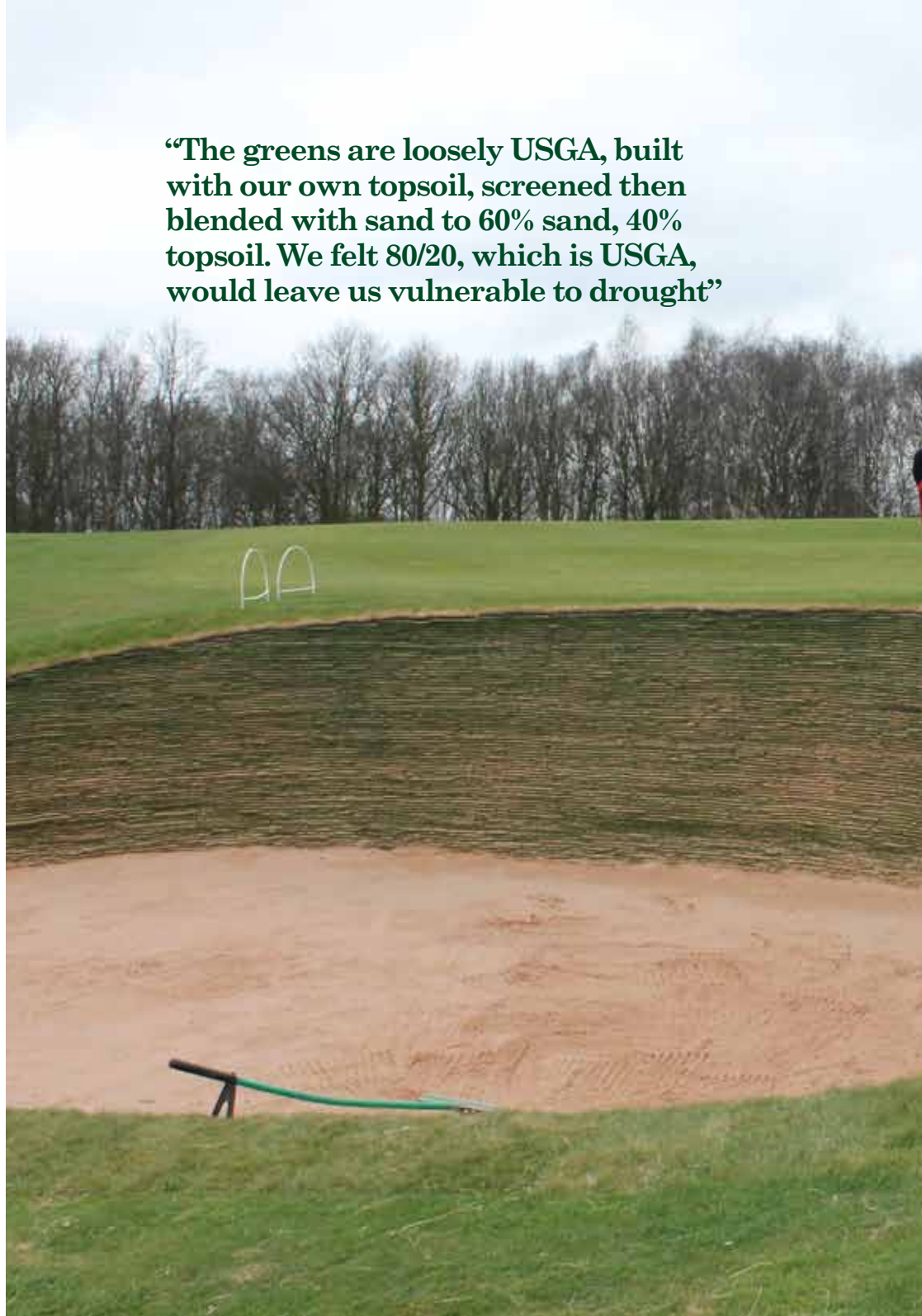
“We bought three shipping containers to act as an office, a shop and the maintenance facility. In reality one had some paperwork in it, one a coffee machine and one a mower.

“My mother took the course fees, my father mowed the fairways and my wife Jane – a schoolteacher by trade - was the first greenkeeper because I was busy running a fertiliser business at that time.

“I bought Jane a second-hand Toro mower at auction and she used that. We ran it as a family top to bottom, and that continues to this day.”

It wasn’t until four years after the course opened that they removed the shipping containers and

“The greens are loosely USGA, built with our own topsoil, screened then blended with sand to 60% sand, 40% topsoil. We felt 80/20, which is USGA, would leave us vulnerable to drought”



constructed the clubhouse which houses a bar, dining area and pro shop.

The family connection is continuing with Phil’s son John working on both the farm and the course. Phil said it’s been a pretty straightforward few years although he recalled one mistake which they had to deal with promptly.

“We did have an incident a good few years ago where some weed killer was accidentally sprayed on the greens, and we had to move play to winter greens in August. We reacted straight away by getting hold of three loads of topdressing, deep scarifying through the turf,

reseeding it in a week and they were back in play in three weeks. It was a genuine error and it’s all about how you react to things – life is never plain sailing as everybody knows.”

The undulating parkland course is now nicely complemented by a nine-hole par three course, which is close to the grain store and farmhouse.

Phil explained that Wakefield has a huge catchment area, and they decided to respond to the need for people to have a quick round of golf after work.

Phil said: “Apart from laying the irrigation, which we contracted out, we built the whole thing. We hired



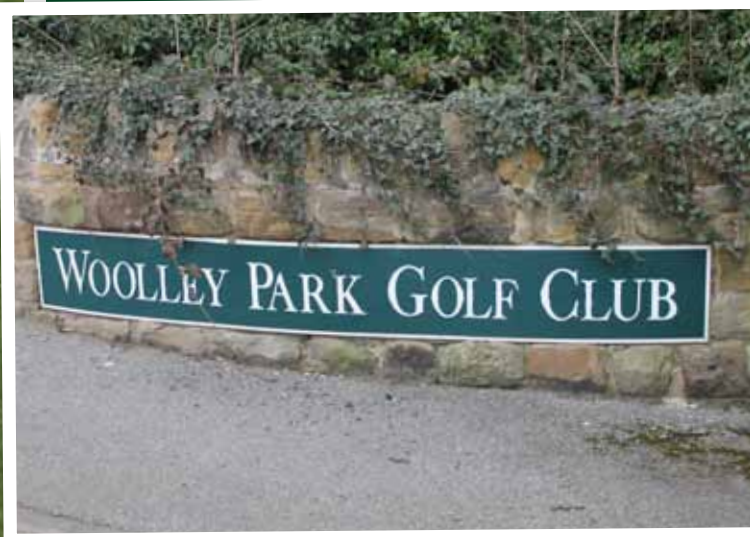
INNOVATION CORNER!

To save hours of labour, Phil took two seven-foot Sisis slitters and welded them together to create a 14-foot slitter!

He added that the slitters were very useful and highly reliable, but this unusual solution obviously allowed his team to slit larger areas of the course at a time.

Have you come up with a similarly ingenious invention on your course?

If so contact steve.castle@bigga.co.uk and we'll print the best!



a screen, screened our own topsoil, bought sand in and made it into rootzone on site.

"It opened in September 2008 and is proving very popular.

"You can turn up in your jeans and trainers or work gear and have a quick round for £9. It was important we maintained standards so we built it to exactly the same specifications as the main course – properly built greens and good drainage.

"We get dads and lads playing, then they want to play the 18 hole course, and some become members. We opened it right in the middle of the recession but it's been

a real success and kept a steady stream of new golfers coming through the doors."

So what about the future? Phil smiled and said: "My attitude is to tell the lads the golf course looks fantastic today, but I want it better tomorrow.

"If they say they need a new piece of kit I will do my utmost to source the budget for it.

"Any budget left over is spent on the golf course, not the locker room. The customers come through the door to play golf and you have to get repeat customers – so the golf course is the most important thing, and always will be."

MACHINERY LIST

Greens

2 x Toro Greensmaster 3250-D
2 x Toro Reelmaster 3100-D
Dakota Topdresser

Fairways

Toro Reelmaster 6700-D
Ransomes 57 mounted hydraulic with floating heads
Trimax Pegasus 6m semi rough mower
Sisis slitter (two 7 footers welded together!)

Vredo 2.5m seeder

Tee surrounds, paths

Imants Shockwave

Others

Bernhard Anglemaster 3000
Bernhard Express Duel 3000