

# Hurly Burghley



## PROFILE

**Name:** Dave Salisbury  
**Role:** Course Manager  
**Born:** Burton upon Trent  
**Handicap:** 14  
**Favourite sports team:** Stamford AFC  
– Dave is a director

How do the team at Burghley Park Golf Club cope with hundreds of caravans – and dogs – on their fairways when the world famous horse trials roll into town? Steve Castle found out, and also heard how the greenkeepers and their vertidrainer helped save the equine event this year



#### PROFILE

**Name:** Gary Salisbury

**Role:** Assistant  
Greenkeeper

**Born:** Burton upon  
Trent

**Handicap:** 28

**Favourite sports**

**team:** Stamford  
AFC – Gary writes the  
match reports

The team: Stuart McCrossan, Dave  
Salisbury, Gary Salisbury, Steve  
Hopkins. Missing is Simon Bossett



**“We just stood there for about an hour, I certainly had a tear in my eye. It was total devastation”.**

Dave Salisbury was in full flow as he recalled the horrific condition some areas of Burghley Park's golf course were in days after the Land Rover Burghley Horse Trials on an unforgettable Monday morning in 2008.

The club allows hundreds of caravans and motor homes to park on certain fairways during the world famous event, usually with manageable disruption. However, a perfect storm of very wet weather five years ago left parts of the course reminiscent of a particularly damp Glastonbury festival.

It's clearly still fresh in the memory for Course Manager Dave. He recalled: “We had very heavy rain at exactly the wrong time and we were pulling motor homes out of the mud throughout the week. There were huge ruts and a foot of sludgy mud everywhere. I've spent the majority of my working life at this course, so to see it in that state was heartbreaking.”

But the club soon swung into recovery mode. It was agreed that external contractors would be hired to assist the four-strong greenkeeping team in getting the course back in play as soon as possible. Dave hurried across the country, visiting various turf nurseries to choose the perfect fescue dominant turf before selecting County Turf in Scunthorpe.

The team knew that with the trials ending in early September, they had little growing time left in the season.

Dave said: “We closed the back nine immediately but within three or four of days we had a short course open on the back nine by cutting temporary tees and greens and using three short holes. We employed a landscaping firm, checked the specifications with the STRI and laid the turf and had completed the work by the end of September.”

You may think the team curse the prestigious trials – but in fact it's an ideal time to complete maintenance as Dave's son Gary explained.

“We're closed for eight days which is a godsend because we're a very busy course, we must average 150 rounds a day and we're rarely closed because the course is built on a limestone hill which offers superb natural drainage.

“Also it's a tight course so when you've got 100 golfers out there's very little room to work on the course.

“So this week we've vertidraind all the tees and greens in two days and now we're moving on to vertidrain the aprons.

“This year we've got 550 caravans parked on the course. So that's 1,000 people and they seem to average three dogs each, and you can imagine what the dogs sometimes leave behind in the rough! We've also had problems with tent pegs being left behind – you don't want one of those going through your mowers but they can be very difficult to spot deep in the ground.

“Visitors can only park on designated areas on four fairways (the 10th, 17th, 18th and practice) and some of the rough in between. We rope the areas off before they arrive where we think there's a danger someone driving along at night might accidentally cut across a green or tee.”

As well as dealing with the aftermath of the trials, Gary – who first helped his dad rake bunkers on the course aged just five - revealed how he came to the rescue in dramatic fashion ahead of this year's event.

He said: “I received a phone call late one night from the Clerk of the Course, Philip Herbert, sounding extremely worried. It turned out a lorry driver had accidentally driven onto the soft grass in the main arena where they hold the dressage, and its wheels had sunk in six inches deep. Phillip said “Somebody told me you've been out vertidrainning – is there any chance you could help?”

“Early the next morning I went to check it out and the fieldgrass in the arena was a mess. They'd watered it to a depth of eight inches because they wanted the going to be soft, so a huge articulated lorry delivering dozens of horse jumps in had left it in a terrible state.

“I put the vertidrain across it on full heave – which dad had never seen before - and drove as slowly as I possibly could. When I'd finished you couldn't see where this lorry had been. Philip was very grateful. In fact it did such a good job we've been vertidrainning our tees on full heave since – but it's always good when you can trial it somewhere else first!”

The 16th century Burghley House is the centrepiece of the large estate in Stamford, and over the last few decades has capitalised on its commercial potential. As well as the equestrian event it now holds regular concerts, exhibitions, markets and the ‘Rat Race’ – an adventure sports weekend. The golf course itself, which uses a separate entrance, has undergone







TOP: The 18th fairway, September 2013  
 TOP RIGHT: The course minus the caravans  
 MIDDLE LEFT: The practice fairway in September 2008  
 MIDDLE ABOVE: At least the visitors have taken heed of the sign!  
 MIDDLE RIGHT: Relaying turf in September 2008  
 LEFT: The horse trials

### MACHINERY LIST

- John Deere
- 2x 2030 Pro Gators
- 2x 2500A Greens Mowers
- 2x 2653A Surrounds Mowers
- 1 x 2653B Precision Cut
- 1 x 3520 Compact Tractor
- 1 x 7400 Terrain Cut
- 1 x 1445 Out Front Rotary
- 1 x 3245C Semi Rough Mower
- 1 x 3235C Fairway Mower
- 4 x Hand Mowers
  
- 1 x Kubota Compact Tractor
- 1 x Wiedenmann Terra Spike XF
- 1 x Dakota Turf Tender
- 1 x Massey Ferguson Tractor & Backhoe
- 1 x Ryan GA30
- 1 x Ransomes HR6910 Rough Mower
- 1 x Bantam Sod Cutter

huge changes since Dave's arrival in 1980.

He said: "When I joined it was a blank canvas – literally a field with 18 holes laid out with no trees, bunkers or ponds – in fact it had no distinguishing features whatsoever. It was managed by two greenkeepers – myself and Stuart McCrossan who's still here today.

"There were hundreds of sheep allowed to graze on the course with electric fencing around the greens. So we've planted hundreds of trees and built the ponds and bunkers in-house, and we're still making changes and continuing to progress now."

In 2010 the club employed golf course architect Tom Mackenzie to conduct an audit, and they've adopted some of his ideas including adding new bunkers and reshaping existing traps.

It's clear that the small team at Burghley Park have a difficult balance to strike. With a small budget in a rural area, and with plenty of courses nearby, they face constant competition for members.

They also require a busy course to keep funds coming in – but naturally this restricts their ability to work on the course as Gary explained earlier.

But Dave concluded: "The changes made after the Mackenzie audit prove we're constantly evolving. If we'd have stood still people wouldn't have wanted to play here – and I truly believe we're the best course in the area.

"Our greens are 75% bents and fescues cut to 3mm. I like perennial grasses – annual meadowgrass is too unpredictable for me. I love this course, if I could wrap it up and take it home with me every night I would."