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Aussie rules

What's it like to be in charge of the golf course on the Marquess of Landsdowne's Estate on Grade One Listed parkland designed by Capability Brown? It's all in a day's work for Jaey Goodchild as Steve Castle discovered

PROFILE

Name: Jaey Goodchild
Born: Brisbane, 5 December 1976
Hobbies: skydiving, fishing
Favourite Sports Team: The Warlocks

ROWWOOD

Arriving at the Rowwood Estate, which lies a few miles west of Chippenham in Wiltshire, felt like accidentally stumbling across the set of 'Downton Abbey' - and I half expected to be summoned for afternoon tea by the Marquess.

The spectacular 6000 hectare site boasts a famous Rhododendron Walk, a secret garden and an 18th century House. The property is Grade I listed. It's 1700 years old. The 9th Marquess of Landsdowne - Rowwood has been the family's home for nearly 200 years. But my visit concentrated on the serious work that's been taking place on the superb golf course.

Byshire-born Jaey Goodchild is Head Greenkeeper at Rowwood Golf and Country Club which covers around 200 acres of the huge site. It's 18 holes of glorious parkland and a former Challenge Tour venue which measures an intimidating 7,300 yards from the blue tees and 6,675 from the white.

Jaey said: "It's a pleasure to work here - just what you would expect one of Capability Brown's works to be. But it's very much a working Estate - there's a greenkeeper and a seasonal staff of site operators. In fact the wooden posts for our year-long signs have been secured from seasoned oak felled on site."

Jaey came to Rowwood in 2011, and his immediate aim was to improve the 18th green which at that time had a high thatch content and high incidence of disease. Where the issue used to be, the green suffered major put-ups due to the lack of surface mobility. The weed was weak with minimal rooting and they would spend hours repairing the greens after aeration.

"My first big challenge was convincing the proprietor, committee and members of the importance of caring for the site and finding a way to fit it in to the schedule. This was difficult in the first year because I started in March when most of the year's business had already been booked. So you are had to be a real 'babe' and offer a approach to keep things ticking over with plenty of communication and light touchworking."

"The schedule now allows using operations per year plus multiple extra maintenance during the winter. Last year we aered the greens 15 times and almost follow up with a light topdress, balancing and rolling to get the surface back on track."

"We're giving the roots the opportunity to develop, bind the soil together and strengthen it. Now we're every confidence we'll have very put-ups when we aerate."

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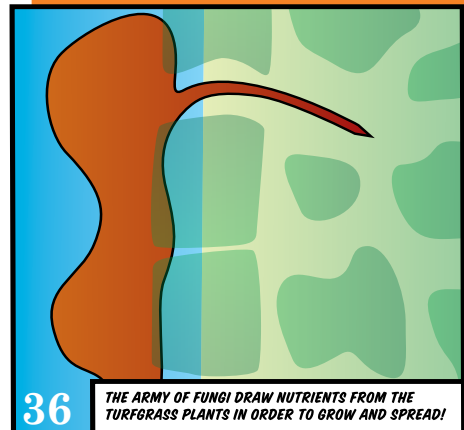


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