



Carnoustie

What happened next?

Sandy Reid and Craig Boath spent years working under the tutelage of John Philp at Carnoustie. A year on from John's retirement, how is one of the world's most famous courses moving forward?



PROFILE

Name: Sandy Reid
Role: Links Superintendent
Born: Perth, 7 February 1977
Handicap: Scratch
Hobbies: Curling, golf
Favourite sports team: Aberdeen

Name: Craig Boath
Role: Head Greenkeeper, Championship Course
Born: Dundee, 10 May 1980
Handicap: 9
Hobbies: Fishing, golf
Favourite sports team: Dunfermline



Steve Mitchell (Buddon Links, Head Greenkeeper), Sandy Reid (Links Superintendent), Craig Boath (Championship Course, Head Greenkeeper), Colin Law (Burnside Head Greenkeeper)

'Hogan's Alley' - named after the legendary golfer who enjoyed such success here in 1953



It was impossible to speak to Sandy Reid and Craig Boath in their recently refurbished maintenance facility without first acknowledging the elephant in the room.

The pair worked with John Philp MBE for many years before his retirement – a man credited with bringing The Open back to this most traditional of golfing venues, and was even honoured when the 11th hole on the Championship Course was named after him. But it was significant that, on the day of its renaming, John was quick to salute the efforts of the team who had supported him throughout his long tenure.

On a blazing hot afternoon on the East coast of Scotland, just days before The Open began 40 miles south at Muirfield, two of that team were keen to discuss their progress over the past 12 months. Sandy (Links Superintendent) and Craig (Head Greenkeeper of the Championship Course) were effervescent in their affection for Carnoustie – and honest about some of the problems they've had to deal with, problems which may surprise some.

I began by asking Sandy - a former curling champion and a scratch golfer - to define his role, a title which is normally the preserve of American greenkeepers. He replied: "It's the three Head

Greenkeepers that run the courses – I'm basically the buyer! The Head Greenkeepers largely think for themselves so they're in control of their own work, and primarily accountable for it too. As good as John was, when I was the Head Greenkeeper of the Championship Course I didn't necessarily want him interfering with my work. Call it stubbornness if you like, but you don't want constant advice. He was always there for guidance but you want to make the decisions yourself and learn from them. I therefore try to manage the Head Greenkeepers in a way that I like being managed myself.

"This way of working allows the Head Greenkeepers to plan ahead, not just for the day or the week, but for months in advance. In turn, this means the staff are more dedicated to the courses as the information from the Head Greenkeepers is more consistent. At least we try to run it that way!

"I'm not really that involved with, for example, setting cutting heights and other routine tasks, or what Craig, Steve Mitchell (Head Greenkeeper of the Buddon Links) and Colin Law (Head Greenkeeper of the Burnside) should or shouldn't use as a fertiliser. I may give some guidance and help confirm their decisions but I don't dictate what they should do. All three courses

Carnoustie have 30 full-time greenkeepers, four staff in the workshop and employ eight seasonal staff.

The course is sand-based with a black sand rootzone. The greens are predominantly bent, with around 50% bent, 30% fescue and 20% poa on the Championship Course. The Burnside is around 50% bent, 15% fescue, 35% poa, and the Buddon Links has more fescue with less bent. The poa is mainly poa annua var. reptans rather than poa annua var. annua.

The team's aeration programme varies. They vertidrain greens in November with either 8mm and/or 13mm tines, last year they were top dressed after the 13mm.

In summer there's a lot of hydro-jet work on the Championship Course, with the team injecting seaweed to encourage root development with varying forms of solid and star tining taking place on the other two courses.

Earlier stage of construction of new holes on the Buddon Links



Later stage of construction of new holes on the Buddon Links



Flooding in December 2012





run similarly anyway, with similar products and shared machinery.”

Sandy has been at Carnoustie since 1997 when he joined as Assistant Greenkeeper after spotting an advert in a local newspaper, having spent time at nearby Letham Grange Golf Club. Craig joined as a trainee greenkeeper a year earlier, so with over 30 years at Carnoustie between them they are steeped in the culture of the place. They’ve also been involved with countless projects on the course – the latest an exciting redesign of some of the current par threes on the Buddon Links.

Sandy said: “PULL QUOTE The Buddon is seen as the third course and we wanted to strengthen it by lengthening the course and reducing the number of par threes. Over the years we’ve lost holes for various reasons and two holes have been made out of one, so we hope these changes will improve the challenge.”

Both Sandy and Craig readily admitted their fortune at having excellent resources at their disposal. But they were equally honest about the problems they’ve had to overcome – mostly caused by the Barry Burn. It may be famous worldwide for troubling the world’s best golfers, but did you know it once flooded the course so badly it washed away an access bridge crucial to the greenkeepers?

Sandy recalled: “There was a bad flood in September 1985, but it didn’t happen again until September 2009, and since then we’ve had floods of varying severity. We had water in the pump house which badly damaged our irrigation system and the halfway hut near our maintenance facility. However, the biggest problem was that our main access bridge to all three courses got washed away. Craig and I were 30 seconds away from driving over it when it collapsed in front of us. We had to live without that for six months until it was rebuilt and take different routes all over the place – and it’s a 340 acre site. It wasn’t until it was gone that we realised just how important it was.”

Craig added: “We’ve been looking at ways to either prevent the flooding entirely or limit the damage. We’ve raised the 17th fairway, raised embankments, raised bridges and consulted with Angus Council to see if they can help us. We’ve also highlighted areas where we intend to install extra drainage because we’ve had to just pump the floodwater away – floods leave this layer of silt which water struggles to penetrate.”

“I’ve been here since 1996 and there’s no doubt that over the last few years, we’ve experienced more intense periods of really heavy rain. Before it would rain normally for

a couple of days - but it’s the two or three hours of intense rain that causes problems. Flooding can be a problem, just as it unfortunately is at so many other courses in the UK, but I feel we’re making real progress.”

Sandy was quick to hail the work ethic instilled by John – and he looked back with great pride on the team’s preparatory work before The Open in 1999, which he was involved in as soon as he arrived.

He said: “The intensity of the work and attention to detail struck me immediately. We knew we had got The Open so for two years beforehand we focused on the Championship Course with some big jobs such as renovating the third fairway. I loved it.”

“I remember we felled trees behind the 15th and 16th to create mounding for spectators. We also built a new putting green, returfed some of the rough as well as revetting all the bunkers. All of the work has always been done in-house, we have the resources to do it and a supportive committee.”

“The whole team do a great job, we’re mostly local and very passionate about the area which comes through in the end product – we have three terrific courses here.”

With John’s legacy complete, it seems certain one of the world’s most famous golfing venues is in safe hands.

MACHINERY LIST

- 10 x Toro Triplex’s (6 x 3420’s & 4 x 3250’s)
- 4 x Toro 5400 Fairway Mowers
- 1 x Toro 3100 Sidewinder
- 7 x Toro Flex 21’s
- 5 x Toro GR1000’s
- 9 x Toro Workmen
- 3 x Kubota RTV’s
- 2 x Toro Multi-Pro Sprayers
- 1 x John Deer Deck, 1 x Kubota Deck
- 14 x Tractors (Kubota and John Deere)
- 2 x Diggers
- 1 x Forklift
- 2 x Toro Hydro-ject’s
- 2 x Charterhouse Verti-Drains
- 4 x Toro Pro-cores (3 x tractor mounted, 1 x pedestrian)
- Hunter Irrigation System
- 5 x greens rollers