

A long time has passed since the last Carnoustie Open but John Philp and his team will present a modern, and formidable challenge for this month's Championship. Scott MacCallum paid them a visit...



Photo: David J Whyte

Many happy returns

Think back to 1975... even for those of us who were alive at the time it seems like an absolute age ago. Harold Wilson was Prime Minister and no-one, outside of her closest friends, had even heard of Margaret Thatcher. We'd not long since had the three day week and endured many an evening huddled around candles. Cars had sensible names like Morris Minor and Ford Anglia, not Xantia or Ka.

It was 24 long years ago - almost a quarter of a century - and marks the last time The Open Championship was played at Carnoustie. To those who know Carnoustie's revered reputation - the toughest course in the country and one where only the finest golfers in the world can win - it seems almost unbelievable that there should be such a long wait between Carnoustie Opens.

However behind the bland statistics that highlight the time lapse is a story as interesting as any which unfolded during any of the five Opens that have been hosted by the Angus town.

Many happy returns

It wouldn't overstate the matter to say that Carnoustie, and the trials and tribulations which went into winning back The Open, would have made an ideal subject for a fly on the wall documentary over the last 20 years or so and credit for the fact that The Open does make a triumphant return later this month is down to many. Tragically, however the one person who did more than anyone else to bring the Championship back to Carnoustie will not be there to see it.

Jock Calder was Chairman of the Carnoustie Links Management Committee and a man whose personality was stamped all over the Angus town's efforts to win back golf's premier Championship. Jock died two years ago, thankfully after it had been confirmed that the last Open Champion of the millennium would join an elite roll of honour that contains the names Tommy Armour, Henry Cotton, Ben Hogan, Gary Player and Tom Watson.

"I'm looking forward to it, without a doubt, but the only sad thing which will never go away for me is the fact that Jock Calder will not be here to see it...The man who brought The Open back to Carnoustie," said Golf Links Superintendent, John Philp.

Below: John Philp with some of his team



"Without him I don't think we would be where we are. He guaranteed the investment that I've enjoyed and benefited from and allowed me to do what we've done though staff levels, equipment, materials and course alterations."

It was Jock Calder who had brought John to Carnoustie in 1985.

"I was Walter Woods' Deputy at St Andrews but saw this a big challenge, just the sort of thing that I enjoy, because you can take something forward and see it develop and mature."

It is a challenge he embraced with real relish and the effort and attention he has poured in the Championship course and the two other links, the Burnside and the Buddon over the last 14 years is quite remarkable.

"My remit, as put to me by Jock Calder, was to get the course back to a championship standard and to bring the other two up to a similar standard as well. I was asked to produce a five year programme...and there is still a five year programme in place," explained John.

It would be fair to say that Carnoustie had suffered from a lack of investment and that the conditioning of the course had suffered as a result but other problems were also stacked against an Open's return, including the poor access to the links and the lack of a quality hotel. That omission was finally corrected in May with the opening of a stunning 85 bedroom hotel overlooking the 18th green which will undoubtedly soon become an established landmark in the world of golf.

"When I arrived I had 11 men to cover the three courses and the degeneration had gone on over a good number of years," he said.

"The first thing to establish was the corrective programme to restore the indigenous grasses and the heather, which had receded badly because of liming and the use of 20-10-10 compound fertiliser.

"Fairways and greens were very much poa dominated although some natural fescues and bents had managed to survive."



There were also patches of Rye grass which John reckoned had been introduced many years before based on the logical thinking at the time that a grass which offered good germination, operated well under drought stress conditions, was tough and recovered well from damage was well worth using.

"You often go up fairways and see tufts of the little blighters probably caused by divot filling years ago."

His first step was to introduce a root zone environment which encouraged the fine grasses to compete.

"We had to get the aeration going so we hired a vertidrain as there was nothing in the sheds other than an



original Sisis Hydromain and a barrel spiker. I took the little barrel onto the 4th green within a week of starting and the turf rolled up like a carpet. I knew it was weak but not quite that weak."

They undertook a huge programme of overseeding - for some years he has been using Barenbrug seed - on the back of the aeration work and returfing on the fairways and a 17 acre turf nursery was introduced. This was all aided by the staged introduction of a fairways, greens and tees Watermation irrigation system that was installed.

"It was a great saviour for all the seeding and patch working we did

especially in the late 80s. Without it we wouldn't have enjoyed the same success rate."

It was the success of the seeding which brought about the introduction of Carnoustie's famous astroturf mats.

"We got a brilliant strike rate in '89 and I thought that we really needed some protection over the winter so as not to lose the benefits. We apply seaweed sprays to aid seed establishment. We also change the route of play in the winter to help the walk off areas but I felt the fairways would benefit further from nobody hacking into them all winter."

John favoured the mats, five by nine

inches in size and anchored by a tee, which had first been used at Scotsraig Golf Club about 20 years earlier but the other options put forward to the Committee were lifting off the fairways and playing from the rough, teeing it up on the fairways or just carrying on as usual.

"I said it would only be for the November to the March, Jock backed me to the hilt and it was carried. When the 1st of April arrived and everyone saw pristine fairways with no divots they were delighted and come the next year they said 'We'll be continuing with the mats no doubt John,' without me having to say anything.

"It wasn't intended to be a continuation every winter but it's happened ever since and this year we had an extra month and the mats were in use until May 1st," adding that mats don't repair dead ground they just play a part in fairway recovery."

Alongside the corrective programme John had also proposed to the committee that he felt that no matter how good the turf quality became the course would still have a shortfall because there were elements that required attention.

"There were internal design elements which I felt were lacking for modern Opens to test today's top players and there were lots of areas

Many happy returns



Above: A fine example of one of Carnoustie's revetted bunkers

where the course's potential had not been nearly realised," he explained.

Donald Steel was called in around '87, looked at the proposals John had suggested, rubber stamped them and added a few more.

"I looked at the design of holes and how the players attack it. Professional golfers are much more capable now. Mentally they have improved, they are physically much more powerful, they have got better equipment and what they can reduce a golf course to is quite amazing."

To highlight the point John talked about the famous Hogan's Alley - on Carnoustie's par-5 6th. Much of Carnoustie's mystique can be credited to Ben Hogan who only played in one Open, at Carnoustie in 1953. He lowered his score in each of the four rounds, closing with a superb 68, and each time on the final day he played the notorious 6th he ignored the safe line and played his tee shot between the bunkers and the out-of-bounds to the left of the fairway.

"Nowadays top players take these bunkers out of the equation by blasting straight over them so the R&A asked if we could put in a new bunker behind the existing ones to preserve the challenge of the hole," said John, who wrote to Jack Nicklaus prior to playing host to the Scottish Open in '95 and '96 for his thoughts on the power of today's players and their affect on our championship courses.

John has also looked at the players'

lay-up areas in a bid to encourage them to take a wood.

"Top players have very good at course management and their number one criteria from the tee is to find the fairway even if it means adding several clubs to their approach shot.

"On certain holes we've tried to entice the player into taking wood because the lay-up area is fraught with danger as well."

John is also making the players think around the greens.

"We've rebuilt five greens on the Championship course and, other than the 18th where the committee wanted the original contours retained, we've brought in more subtle contouring."

This has allowed a variety of recovery shot requirements to be introduced.

"Some raised greens are cut short all the way round so if you run through the green the ball keeps going and you're left with a tricky chip, especially to a tight pin placement. On another green you run off into a fluffy fescue semi rough about two inches long.

"If offers up a variety of challenges. Why should it be consistent? Why should there be a set width of semi rough? We've sculpted it differently on specific holes.

"For example the 4th is a dogleg left and, if the fairways are hard during The Open a player could quite easily run out of fairway and lose his ball, but he wouldn't have hit a particularly bad shot. So we'll give him a bit of leeway

there and have a little more semi rough, rather than thick stuff so he is prevented from being overly punished," said John, who as an ex-greenkeeper/professional has the golf game to play the shots himself and see where these types of situations are likely to arise.

The Carnoustie team - there is now a to 28 including a workshop staff of four and four apprentices - do all the construction work in-house and work on a policy of rebuilding 30-40 of the 115 Championship course bunkers a year, although in preparation for The Open this winter they rebuilt 80.

"I've got to hand it to my staff. The target was to set a standard for the new millennium and they really have produced the goods. It would be very difficult to better what they've achieved here," said John.

"We have recontoured the land to many bunker lead in areas to create a gathering effect and in the bunkers themselves have a 30 degree slope to the face and a small lip at the back, of about two rows of revetments high, which stops people having to clamber out and eroding the sides."

It is another example of the care and attention to detail that pervades everything John Philp and his team accomplish at Carnoustie and it would be a safe bet that thanks to all the work carried out both on and off the course that has been carried out the next Open to be staged at the course will not be in the year 2023.

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Above: A Bridge of Sighs...
If your ball happens to
be underneath!
(Bridge from Woodscape Ltd)

Golf Course furniture can add the finishing touches to the excellent work you do in preparing your course, as Roland Taylor explains...

Bridge the gap



The last decade has certainly seen considerable changes in golf with the introduction of increasing numbers of commercially run clubs, pay-and-play venues and municipal courses being established across the country. Some may say that golf is now part of the leisure and sporting entertainment industry, especially with the greater media coverage it now enjoys.

While this analysis might not be to everyone's taste, it has meant that the over-all presentation of a course is an important part of the marketing package. For any commercially run establishment it is necessary to have a corporate identity that creates a high profile and public awareness. They want as many people as possible to play the course and to enjoy their visit so they return, and also tell all their friends about it.

These changes have led to some interesting developments. One of these is in golf course furniture and accessories. Suppliers in this sector are reporting a significant increase in business and interest. Many courses

have discovered a source of extra revenue - sponsorship. Items like litter bins, divot boxes or tee markers are ideal advertising sites.

For those Course Managers or Greenkeepers looking for signage, accessories or furniture there is plenty of choice.

Harmonising with the surroundings and withstanding the elements are two of the most important features. One company that has taken this into consideration is Surrey-based Eagle Promotions. They use a photographic process to etch onto a zinc plate. A positive or negative film of the required image is exposed to the specially treated metal surface. It is then etched. Varying the temperature of the etching solution controls the depth of the imprint. The plate is then primed and stove enamelled. All the raised areas are machined bright. Finally, coatings of epoxy resin and polyurethane are applied for UV stability.

Because of the nature of this process it is possible to include logos and hole diagrams. Any size or shape of plate can be made and mounted on to the

Bridge the gap

Signage can be as attractive as it is practical



chosen material. This could be stone, natural rock or wood. An alternative to natural rock is the use of pre-cast concrete. By using different aggregates and cement pigmentation plus various finishings they can produce stone-effect pedestals.

Border Golf from Shrewsbury etches stainless steel and bronze plaques. These can include hole maps and any logos in full colour and there is a choice of mountings including reconstituted stone or natural rock. The company also manufactures reinforced granite resin composites which can be mounted on plinths and stands made from powder coated steel, Iroko and kiln dried Oak.

Meeting an individual club's corporate or identity requirements is the reason for their success according to Links Leisure Ltd. Their "Pro Tee Collection" includes signs, tee-markers, litter bins or divot boxes. All are tailor-made in detail, style and colour for each course. They are cast from weatherproof glass reinforced cement. The manufacturers say this has been used in the construction industry for over twenty years, it is durable and requires the minimum maintenance. Signs can be mounted on metal post or free-standing units.

Timber is ideally suited for blending into the landscape and a company that specialises in this material is



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Woodscape from Lancashire. They offer a wide range of products including litter bins, seats, signs and bridges.

They use "Greenheart" timber for most of their products. It is claimed to be one of the hardest and most durable timbers in the world with a life expectancy of over 100 years in the UK without any preservative treatment. Among their range is hardwood paving setts that are suitable for paths or walkways or areas that have a lot of foot traffic. According to the supplier these can be quickly laid on a smooth compact permeable base. When it comes to footbridges the company can advise on the best design to blend in with the natural landscape.

Britannic Teak says that outdoor furniture must be of a quality that enhances and harmonises with the elements and natural surrounds. While providing a comfortable resting-place, it also has to withstand heavy use and the rigours of the UK climate. Their range of traditional and classical benches and seats are manufactured from genuine plantation teak which they say is strong, stable and impervious to the weather and does not require preservatives or paint.

Whilst Furnitubes offer an extensive range of street furniture, they do have a number of products that could be of interest for those readers whose responsibilities include areas around the clubhouse complex. Their cast-iron litter bins are available as circular, square or octagonal units. These can strengthen the corporate identity by being fitted with plaques which can be produced by photo etching or by traditional hand carving. Other items in their range include traditional cast iron and timber seating, directional signage information panels and finger posts.

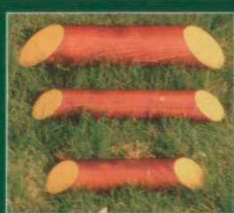
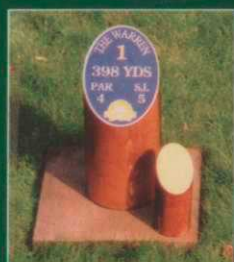
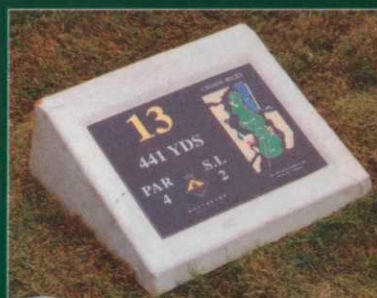
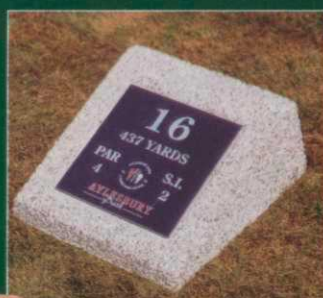
Dura-Sport, from Leicester, have recently introduced a range of golf furniture that they claim is almost identical in appearance to wood, but is manufactured from recycled plastic. Using the latest technology, everyday plastic waste is transformed into wood substitute materials that can be nailed, screwed and sawn. This material they say also has joinery capabilities which enables the company to produce outdoor furniture that has low maintenance and long life.



Keeping areas around trees clear of grass and weeds can be a time consuming operation, plus the fact there is a chance of damage from a mower or line trimmer. According to Linpac Environmental, their Edgemasta Tree Guard is an effective new protection system for trees. A safety zone is created around the base of each tree which protects it from damage while retaining mulch and moisture. A weed suppression membrane can be fitted as an optional extra. The Edgemasta, which is made from UV stabilised polyethylene comes in a range of shapes and colours. It is said to be easy to install and requires no further maintenance.

A factor that needs to be taken into account when installing any course furniture is how it will be kept clear of that feather of uncut grass that forms around the actual static items or their supporting posts. If not added at this stage, it could become a time consuming cutting operation later. It could be set on a pea shingle base or wood chippings. This needs to be larger than the item and below the turf so mowers will cut up to the edge. This will require trimming either by hand or with an engine-powered edger.

Good signage benefits the players and can help to speed up the game. It needs to be discrete, give out an easy to read message and blend with the landscape. If in any doubt about whether your club has got it right, then take a walk around your course viewing it from a stranger's point of view. If you find that signs are missing or out-of-date, or just looking a little sad, then perhaps the time has come for a face-lift.



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