



Head Greenkeeper Colin Jones (second left) with colleagues Paul Evans, Karl Parry and Peter Richards, and (back row) Club Captain Martyn Scholes, with Gareth Bellis, and Les Robins (volunteers)

STONE ME! Greenkeepers learn new skills

With an old dry stone wall at Mold Golf Club in Flintshire falling into disrepair, Head Greenkeeper Colin Jones and his staff enrolled on a college course to learn how to restore it to its former glory using traditional methods

Mold Golf Club is celebrating its centenary in the autumn of this year. The club was formally constituted at a meeting held in the Town Hall in the autumn of 1909. A golf club at nearby Hafod Hall had been established in 1905, but a contemporary report indicates that, “owing to the stiff climb necessary to reach the course preparatory to play the interest flagged.”

According to minutes of that first meeting “there was a large and fully representative muster of golf devotees of the neighbourhood present” and it was decided that there should be an entrance fee of half a guinea for ladies and one guinea for gentlemen, and a yearly subscription of one guinea for all members. The minutes also state “A goodly list of members was enrolled.”

The club acquired its first clubhouse in January 1910, when it bought the cricket pavilion from Mold Recreation Ground. Severe gales in February necessitated some “readjustment” of the structure.

Back in those early days the fairways were maintained by a Model T Ford pulling gang mowers. Things have moved on a touch since then!

In 1927 the club moved to Pen y Parc, due to the risk of flooding and poor drainage qualities at the original site, claiming “the new land is all mountain turf and is ideal for golf.” The course was originally a nine hole, bounded on one side by a dry stone wall - age

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unknown, but thought to date back hundreds of years.

The modern course at Mold is an 18 hole, 5603 yard, par 67 uplands course with stunning views of the Clwydian Hills, Cheshire and the Peak District. The additional nine holes were added the other side of the old wall.

Head Greenkeeper is Colin Jones. He began his greenkeeping career at Padeswood and Buckley Golf Club at the age of sixteen, whilst on a YTS scheme and studying at the Welsh College of Horticulture.

By the age of nineteen he was Deputy Head Greenkeeper at Padeswood and Buckley before moving six miles ‘up the hill’ to Mold to take on the Head Greenkeeper role at the age of twenty-five. He has been with the club for eleven years and says “I really enjoy working here”. Not difficult to understand when you see its stunning location.

Colin has three staff to assist him, Paul Evans, Peter Richards and ‘new boy’ Karl Parry.

One of Colin’s bugbears in his time at Mold has been the old dry stone wall which was falling into a state of disrepair and, in places, considered dangerous. Golfers were probably partly to blame for its demise as they were hopping over it to look for their wayward golf balls. So, last year, he decided to do something about it. Colin takes up the story:

“I tried to get a grant to help fund its repair from CADW, the historic environment service of the Welsh Assembly Government. ‘Cadw’ (pronounced cad-oo) is a Welsh word meaning ‘to keep’.

Unfortunately, there was no grant aid available and the cost of repairing this massive stretch of wall would have been

around £13-14,000. The budget for that was simply not available as I was in the process of rebuilding my old clay based greens to USGA specification, doing all the work in-house and tackling one green a year.

Gordon Hughes, a member of our Greens Committee and a keen walker of the course and surrounding countryside, had expressed his concerns about the wall, and how this wonderful piece of our heritage was not going to be around for much longer if nothing was done.

He suggested to me that the greenkeeping staff could go on a dry stone walling course to learn this age old skill and rebuild the wall in-house.

I took this on board and thought, why not, we do everything else in-house? I’m a great believer in the old adage ‘why pay someone to do a job when you can do it yourself’ and, if I save the club money, it means there’s more funds available for new machinery! I spoke to my staff (which, at the time, included John Williams but not Karl, his replacement) and, to my delight, they were all keen and willing to go on the course with me.

We joined the course at Llys Fasi College, where our tutor was Craig Evans, the dry stone waller on Moel Arthur, part of the Clwydian Hills.

In January 2008 we started rebuilding the 285 metre stretch of wall that separates two fairways. The work was scheduled around the more important greenkeeping tasks and, obviously, the upkeep of the course came first. We worked in the rain, sleet and some pretty windy conditions - Mold is an exposed site some 850 feet above sea level.

As a lot of the stone had gone missing over the years, I decided to make more

gaps in the wall. I thought this made good sense as it would save a bit of time. But, I quickly realised it was more difficult and time consuming to make two ‘cheek ends’ to form the gap.

When the grass started growing, the work on the wall had to stop. In the autumn we also added drainage to an old clay based green, as a cheaper alternative to a complete rebuild, as I didn’t want too much disruption to the course in its build up to the Centenary. The work has already proved an instant success.

In January 2009 the work recommenced on the dry stone walling. Members were constantly making positive comments on the job, so I put up a notice to see if anyone was interested in learning this old skill and helping us.

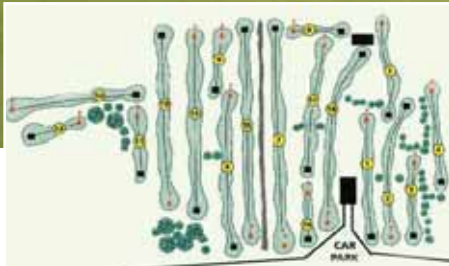
Our newest member of staff, Karl Parry, joined the team along with some keen and willing volunteer members, Gareth Bellis, Bill Spence and Les Robins. The wall was finished in March and it certainly makes a superb feature for the club in its Centenary year.

The feedback from the members has been incredible; everyone has congratulated us on the job and even had a raffle to give us a bonus as a token of their appreciation.”

A ‘green’ approach

“As mentioned previously, the greens are gradually being upgraded to USGA specification. So far nine have been completed, six of them in-house. The remainder are mainly ‘a horrible clay base’!

They are a mixture of bents and poa. We cut at 5mm in the summer and 8mm in the winter. Each green is hollow cored



Course plan of Mold Golf Club showing where the old dry stone wall separates the 7th and 15th fairways

with 8mm tines twice a year although this has been reduced for the Centenary. I try to aerate once a week throughout the year alternating between solid tining, deep slitting and star slitting depending on competitions and conditions.

I haven't used temporary greens for many years now, but I know I still have problems with my old greens and we'll continue with the upgrading programme.

We use 100 tonnes 70/30 topdressing a year. In spring a 4:0:4 turf hardener is applied, followed by 8:0:0. I follow that up with light liquid nitrogen feeds if and

when necessary. I use seaweed throughout the summer and applications of iron all year round. Aquazorb is the wetting agent of choice.

The course is very high up with lots of rocky limestone outcrops, but there is also a lot of overlying clay brought down by glaciers. I use my verticutters a few times in summer, set 3mm above the ground, just to tidy up the coarse lateral growth that comes with some of the browntop bent grasses.

I overseed with good bent cultivars in late August or early September, using Primo-Maxx to slow down the competition.

I'm all for the STRI's Disturbance Theory and think the 'gingerbreads' are doing a fantastic job of sharing their aims and beliefs through the pages of

this magazine. Yes, I know that it is nothing new but, sometimes, you need to be reminded that it takes time to achieve your goal. That you can't rush things. It has to be a 'gently, gently' approach! I firmly believe in sustainable golf and, to that end, have entered into the STRI Environmental Award.

One other thing that has proved popular with members and visitors is a hole by hole wildlife booklet that I have written for the club. It explains to golfers what they can expect to see as they play each hole.

I am trying to raise the awareness of golfers as to how important golf courses are to the environment. That they are not just sterile tracts of land but, if managed properly, can become wildlife havens"



GRADEN

I would consider it the biggest innovation in greenkeeping since vertidraining – Mark Timberlake – Golf Club Lich – Germany.



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TWENTY Questions

Colin Jones - enjoys a damn good barbecue, and would like to enjoy Kelly Brook - it's the eyes!

Who are you? Colin Jones, Head Greenkeeper, Mold Golf Club.

Family status? Engaged to Sophie, with three children, Oliver 12, Jacob 7 and Lily Grace 2.

Who's your hero and why? Bob Taylor from the S.T.R.I, because of his excellent knowledge of wildlife and the environment.

What is your dream holiday? Anywhere with my family.

What annoys you the most? Golfers that don't bother raking bunkers after themselves, it's just lazy.

What would you change about yourself? I'd learn to relax more.

Who wouldn't you like to be? Alex Ferguson, do you need a reason?!

Favourite record, and why? Don't stop me now, by Queen. It just makes me smile.

Who would you choose to spend a romantic evening with? Sorry Soph, but I'd choose Kelly Brook (she's got lovely big eyes!).

If you won the lottery, what is the first thing you would do? Buy the golf course and ban those few members who just moan about everything!

If you were to describe yourself as a musical instrument, what would you be and why? A piano, because it can be quiet and sometimes loud.

What's the best advice you have ever been given? My Mum once said "keep your eyes and ears open and your mouth shut" - its not always easy though!

What's your favourite smell? A damn good BBQ.

What do you do in your spare time? Play golf with the kids and go fishing.

What's the daftest work related question you have ever been asked? Do you do anything in winter?

What's your favourite piece of kit? 200L Gambetti sprayer, it was my first purchase at the club.

What three words would you use to describe yourself? Quiet, honest, and hard working.



What talent would you like to have? To be a natural golfer.

What makes you angry? Dogs running around the course in the evenings, in and out of bunkers, arrghh!

What law/legislation would you like to see introduced? Well, that's got to be dogs on leads in public places, especially golf courses!

SHARPEN MOWERS FOR GREENER GRASS

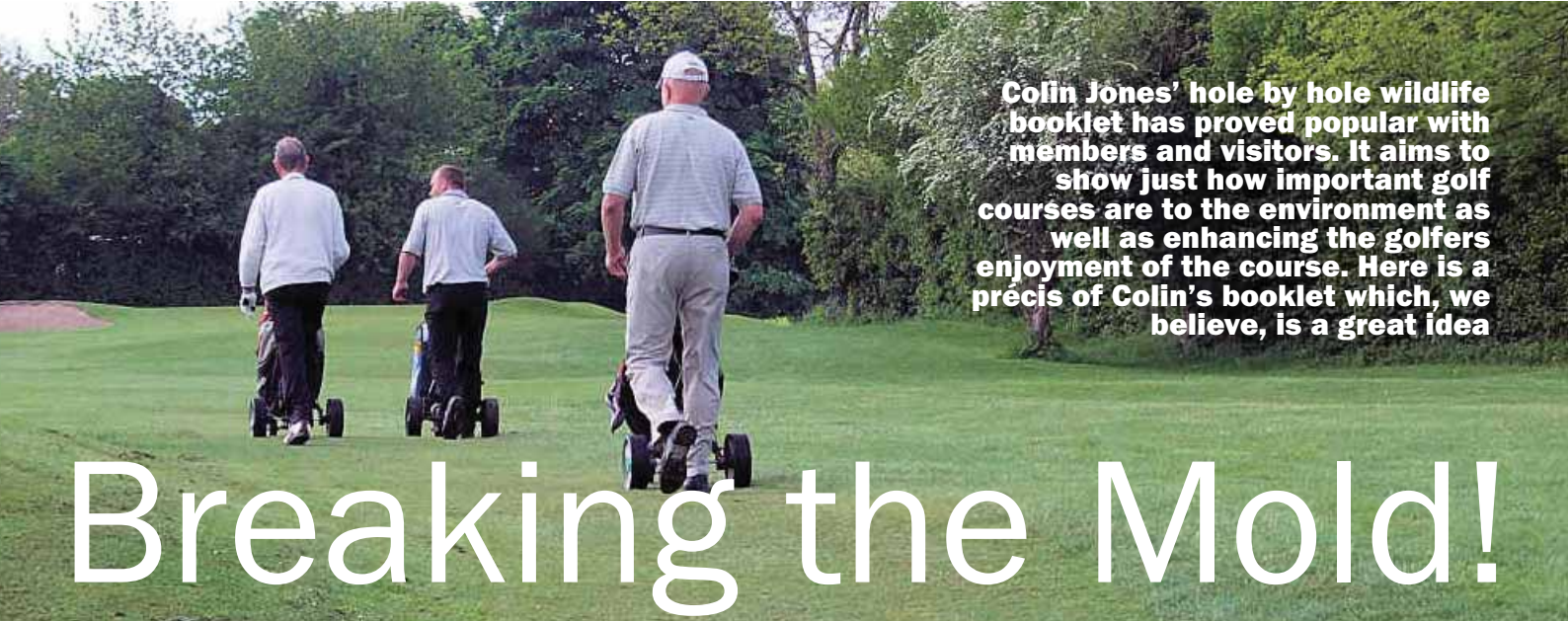


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Colin Jones' hole by hole wildlife booklet has proved popular with members and visitors. It aims to show just how important golf courses are to the environment as well as enhancing the golfers enjoyment of the course. Here is a précis of Colin's booklet which, we believe, is a great idea

Breaking the Mold!

Hole 1: The gorse to the left and right flowers every spring and winter; it is good hazard and a useful wildlife habitat, which provides a good roosting and nesting site for long-tailed tits and other small birds, whilst the flowers of this species act as an excellent nectar source for bumble bees. The right side of the fairways are a variety of trees such as ash, beech, silver birch and scots pine. Greater willow herb and nettles encourage hoverflies, bees and butterflies amongst the gorse to the left.

Hole 2: The rough to the left of the fairway is not only out of bounds but is left undisturbed for the benefit of the wildlife. Greater celandine (yellow) and garlic mustard (white) take advantage of this naturally wild area. A variety of evergreen and deciduous trees segregate this hole from the 1st.

Hole 3: An uphill par 3 with great grassy undulations, a slice and the ball is all but lost in unforgiving long rough grass amongst a copse of silver birch, where moles are active. Cow parsley borders this hole along the untouched hedgerow, popular with the gatekeeper butterfly. The grey squirrel is fairly common on the course, they do have a reputation as a pest that damages trees but we have not witnessed any problem within the course from this agile denizen.

Hole 4: The woodland up the right side of this hole is abundant with all sorts of wildlife; nesting buzzards are easily seen and heard. As you reach the green, listen to the sounds of the smaller songbirds within the woodland fringe. Chiffchaff and willow warbler will provide the spring chorus giving way to resident species such as blackbird, song thrush and robin through spring to early summer. Sparrowhawks nest in the woods and can often be seen darting along the edge of the woodland in search of prey. These birds only take their prey on the wing, eating it where it falls - hence the piles of feathers often seen on the fairways.

Hole 5: Flanked by dense mature woodland, tawny owls can regularly be heard around the woods at dusk. Listen out for the harsh cry from the colourful member of the crow family, the Jay. Golfers have reported seeing adders down the wall on the 5th, an ideal location for them as this east facing wall warms in the early morning sun. Be careful how you retrieve your lost ball.

Hole 6: The gorse is the best wildlife habitat here, and is the favourite place for rabbits and longtailed tits. Ox-eye daisy flourishes on the wild banks of this tee. There is a badger set hidden away amongst the undergrowth. Their damage activity is rarely seen on the course as the greens staff quickly repair it every morning before complaints.

Hole 7: Purple orchids favour this ground at the top of the quarry, where there is very little soil. Ivy can be seen on many trees through the tunneled walk through the woods. It's one of the few plants to flower in September providing valuable nectar for bees. It also provides excellent year round protection for many insects and birds. Opinions are split on ivy being a nuisance to trees; it will not kill a healthy tree

although a weak tree will succumb to ivy infestation. At Mold we have done some ivy cutting, but left some for the wildlife. This ancient wall facing the prevailing wind is covered with lichens. Alongside the 7th green lady's bed straw (yellow), cow parsley (white), and tufted vetch (purple) can be seen attracting many insects.

Hole 8: On the left of the tee is an area untouched for long grass, bracken, thistle and wild flowers which, although can look unkempt, provides outstanding conservation value. Keep an eye out for the kestrel that comes hunting for voles in this area. The hovering bird of prey kills and eats on the ground after 'dropping' on to its target. Halfway up the hill is an Aspen tree. Its leaves can be heard fluttering in the breeze. In autumn it is always surrounded by fly agaric - a striking red and white spotted toadstool commonly represented in childrens' books.

Hole 9: A pair of peregrine falcons nest in the quarry behind this green; they can be heard calling and seen carrying pigeons and crows back to their nest in summer. They are the fastest bird in the world so blink and you'll miss them. Ravens, the largest member of the crow family, can also be seen around this area, but keep an eye on your golf ball as they have been known to carry them away mistaking them for eggs. Dog rose that borders the 9th wall is armed with curved thorns and look close if you enjoy gooseberries as there are wild bushes here.

Hole 10: On your way to the 10th tee enjoy the walk through the gorse and you'll see red and white campion. Try to be very quiet and you could see wood mice, stoats and other wild animals. There are plenty of wild raspberry bushes in this area for golfers and animals to feed on in August. Don't get confused with the puff balls growing in the rough, as they do look a little like golf balls from a distance. The summer of 2007 was extremely wet which was good for fungi as they are not normally active until early autumn when conditions are damper.

Hole 11: Behind the green is a ten year old crab apple tree which will bring future wildlife to enjoy its fruit. Behind the tee is a fox's den, the inhabitants have been spotted many times early in the morning crossing the course on their way home. Pipistrelle bats can be seen around this area at dusk, but occasionally appear in the daytime.

Hole 12: This quiet corner of the course is popular with field forget-me-not, rabbits abound, not forgetting the magpies. Although magpies, being opportunists, will take eggs and chicks, this has been shown by the RSPB to have little direct relevance to the song bird decline that is being experienced through the country. In fact recent research shows that smaller birds in woodland situations do tend to occur in greater numbers around magpies and other larger predatory species, possibly due to feeling more secure through much of the year!

Hole 13: In summer, yellow iris will fill the pond, which is also full of dragonflies, frogs and pond

skaters whilst the water lasts. A slice could land you in the pond or in the wildflower rich rough grassland which will provide a visual treat for the golfer in mid summer. Over hit your shot and you can find yourself looking for your ball in the blackberry bushes. Bramble is an important shrub providing cover and a rich food source to many smaller birds and invertebrates. Rooks regularly visit this area for food; divots are replaced by golfer and greenkeeper only to be turned over again by the rook, jackdaws and carrion crows.

Hole 14: Bluebells border this area in spring, which encourage bees and butterflies. A dead hawthorn can also be seen which is left for insects and small birds, such as treecreepers and nuthatches, to feed on. A newly planted oak tree can be seen in the foreground, an excellent tree for wildlife. Ragwort is a component of the grassland well behind the tee. This species is often persecuted for its harmful properties to cattle and horses when cut into hay. It does, however, provide an important ecological resource, particularly for the cinnabar moth, which is endemic to this species. At Mold we control ragwort to limit its extent, whilst leaving sufficient to enhance the wildlife.

Hole 15: The hawthorn on this hole always looks a picture when flowering in May which is also the name of the hawthorn's flower. It is normally late flowering due to the course's altitude. You can also see birdsfoot trefoil - the main food plant of the common blue butterfly. The old limestone wall shows how moss is colonising the damp shady conditions under the ash and sycamore trees.

Hole 16: The cowslips survive well amongst the uncut wire fescue. The tall leylandii at the back of the green provide a good nesting site for wood pigeon. Broom is natural here and is spreading well. We are trying to encourage it, along with the gorse, on various areas of the course as it attracts butterflies and insects, and is also a good golfing hazard when established.

Hole 17: This is the highest point of the course with dramatic views in all directions. Buzzards can be seen soaring and taking an easy meal of worms off the fairway early on a winter's morning. The old building is used by pied wagtails every year for a nest site. We've also put up a bat box, but it has not been used as yet. Field voles have made the competition tee their home; these holes have been used for years. The tee is made with local limestone making good cavities for nesting. The poor quality of the grass is caused by a combination of very little soil overlying rock and huge leylandii conifers sucking up water, leaving arid conditions for grass growth.

Hole 18: Shaggy ink cap can be found around the tee. When taking your last putt do give consideration to the amount of wildlife and habitats seen during your round, and consider the role the golf course plays in the environment - golf courses are brilliant nature reserves.