

## Still here!

Pleasant Times is a newsletter of Mount Pleasant Golf Club resurrected in 2020 after not being seen for many years.

Work on the course continues, England Golf have sent out frameworks for Clubs so that they can prepare ready for any relaxation in the lockdown. Chinks of light but still some way to go yet.

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## On Course

**Latest from Gavin – he wants more rain!**

Greenkeeping work has continued on the course within the specified guidelines from England Golf, the R&A and BIGGA.

The weather has been the main issue this month. It has been great for all our wellbeing with the days of sunshine but the course has been very dry for a while now. We had only had 7mm which fell on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> up until 28<sup>th</sup> April when we measured 16mm. The recent

rain was much needed!! We hope this will really kick start the growth and recovery as the ground will be very warm.



Pond by 7<sup>th</sup> Tee March 26th

We have been cutting the greens twice a week. We have kept the height of cut to 5mm and intend to until we see good recovery from the dry weather. This will reduce the stress on the grass and keep the greens healthier.



Pond by 7<sup>th</sup> Tee April 26th

The other areas of the course have been cut once a week except some of the rough which has been left to recover and will be cut soon now it's rained.

The repairs we made in March to divots on tees and fairways should now take effect as the seed germinates and fills the gaps.

We have had some issues with the irrigation. Unfortunately, this has meant we had to turn it on at the greens by hand for a while each morning and evening. We then had to dig up each box by the greens. Then we had to replace the connections for the system to work from the computer, enabling us to return to automatic overnight watering. This has now been completed but we now need to dig up some individual sprinklers to improve their operation.

May should see the course improve quickly and be ready for when we are allowed to open.

### Extension News

The seeding of the final 2 greens and the surrounding areas have been completed and the recent rain was much needed. The forecast is for a wetter month which we need to continue the seed germination and growing of these areas.

The 7 greens seeded last year have been fertilized and are now beginning to grow much better. Again, there has been an issue with the irrigation to the new greens. We had to operate it at each green by hand and were struggling to get enough water on the greens to keep the grass growing. Thankfully, this has been resolved and the watering of these greens can also be

operated from the shed by the controller allowing us to water overnight and when needed.

Contour Golf are now cleaning all the bunkers out on the new course and completing our snagging list, which keeps getting longer as we want everything done that is needed before they leave.

The whole area (except the newly seeded areas) have now been cut a few times and the grass is beginning to thicken up. Soon we will begin the process of slowly reducing the height of cut across the course to start marking out the green surrounds, tees and fairways.

## Wildlife

During the lockdown the wildlife has definitely been enjoying the course with few disturbances. Only some greenkeeping machines and the 'Police Squad' have been on the course, so we have seen an increase in numbers and species.

There have been up to 3 swans flying around and enjoying the new lakes. Unfortunately, there have been 2 herons looking for some fish but hopefully the lakes are deep enough for the fish to be out of reach.

We have seen the usual Canada geese and at least one pair are sitting on a nest on the island on the 2<sup>nd</sup> hole lake. There has also been a couple of greylag geese around on the new holes as seen in the next photo.



On the lake at the 2<sup>nd</sup> hole there are 2 pairs of tufted ducks now regularly being seen and an egret is spotted occasionally.

A buzzard has also found a home on the course as we see this flying low anywhere from the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> to the 2<sup>nd</sup> holes. Hopefully this is a male trying to feed the female nesting somewhere close by.

There are numerous pheasants around the old holes which are enjoying themselves on the seeded areas and looking quite fat... hopefully, they haven't found all the seed!!

Also, we have seen many hares running around. There must be at least 5, as they were spotted about a week ago enjoying the freedom with some playful boxing!

Hopefully, when we are back golfing these new animals won't feel too disturbed and stay around the course.

*Gavin*

## England Golf

England Golf are the governing body for our sport in this country.

England Golf this week sent out an email to all Clubs as follows: -

*"England Golf has produced a series of 'Play Safe, Stay Safe' guidelines to enable our golfers, clubs and counties to prepare in advance for golf's return.*

***Whilst there is not currently a date for the return to playing golf, it is prudent to consider the necessary steps required ahead of the re-opening of golf facilities.***

*The five areas covered in comprehensive detail are as follows:*

- *Communications*
- *Volunteers*
- *Business Support*
- *Preparing your facility*
- *Playing the game*

*We have built a robust framework for clubs and continue to collaborate with the other home nations, The R&A and industry associations to ensure a responsible and organised return to playing the game when government allows it.*

*Guidance may require to be re issued as government measures to combat COVID-19 are reviewed and updated."*

The detailed frameworks received with the email will help the MPGC Management and Committees as we plan for a return to golf. We will keep you informed as things progress as soon as we have more concrete things to report.

## Clubhouse

### A really clean Clubhouse.....

As with all golf clubs, we are keeping up to date with Government announcements and England Golf directives (including the above), but to date there is no confirmed re-opening date, just lots of speculation. By management being on site and an active part of the business, along with very supportive staff and a great group of volunteers, we will be able to react quickly to any announcements made. We are using this time to deep clean the clubhouse and proshop ready for re-opening.

There will no doubt be varying degrees of reopening; golf course, clubhouse, restaurant and functions, that we shall need to respond to, but unfortunately, at this stage, we are unable to commit to anything definite, other than to say, we will be up and running again as soon as we are able....

### MP Stondon 'Police Squad'

Thanks go to our volunteers, who continue to help us police the land, and welcome to, Luke Fensome, Trace Buggins and Marc Ambrose, our newest recruits!

Steve Plumb has been out stone collecting most days and this has been a great help, along with John Finnigan who takes time out from his 'jokes' (if you are friends with John on Facebook you will know exactly what we mean!) to go thistle digging!

## How MPGC Began

### How I came to build a golf course by David Simkins

I have had a bit of stick from Ruth for using 'I' not 'We' but I reminded her that when I first mentioned I had been giving some thought to building a golf course she had said 'If you think you're getting me involved in a golf club you've got another think coming!'



The land before construction started

When I succeeded my father, we were farming 250 acres. We had 2 farms with a 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the land 3 miles away at Church farm Campton, which made for a lot of toing and froing, with machinery and livestock. 30 acres was rented from Beds County Council, and they wouldn't pass the tenancy on to me, so I immediately lost over 10% of the business! Rules of succession were later changed. I took over the business with an overdraft and an Estate Duty bill.

The farm was a typical mixed farm, with a dairy herd, and growing cereals, vegetables and market garden crops.

Through the 70's and 80's we worked hard, reducing and modernising the enterprises and trying one or two new ones.

I won a contract to deliver fruit and veg into local schools for a few years and for a short time we ran a farm shop, converting what had been the cow shed/milking parlour (became the original clubhouse). For all our efforts the business was just holding its own, like many farmers we were asset comfortable but cash poor!

In the late 80's a local farming family with some 4,000 acres got into financial difficulties and the land was put up for sale. Some of this land adjoined some of our land. I had just put in an application to convert the barns where Gavin & Tara now live into 3 dwellings. Gavin was about to go to Shuttleworth Agricultural College and was hoping to return to the family business. I realised we needed to expand the business and so, with the expectation of money from the barn conversions I made bids for some of the adjacent land.

When the children were growing up, I built a simple grass tennis court where the putting green is now. There wasn't a pond on the farm so I had a small pond constructed where 2 ditches joined up near the 2<sup>nd</sup> tee. Soil from ditches is usually very fertile from many years of cleaning the silt out. We used this to make the tennis court. This area of land had, for more than 100 years been part of the stack yard. Before the advent of combine harvesters, the sheaves of corn were built into stacks, with sloping roofs, and usually lightly thatched, to keep the rain out. The stacks were usually built in 2

rows with room between them for the threshing tackle to move down and be fed from either side. The threshing tackle was, for most of the 100 years, driven by belts from a steam engine. Every morning before the fire could be lit the firebox had to be scraped out of ash and clinker. This over time made for a natural free draining base which was perfect for the tennis court/putting green.



The land, shown above, which is now the 10<sup>th</sup> tee was an old overgrown orchard, as was half the car park. I was approached by a contractor working at RAF Henlow who wanted to find a home for 100+ loads of rough topsoil/subsoil. I said they could clear the orchard and level the soil onto it. I would not take any payment because I knew if I did it would not be easy to turn the lorries away if they brought in rubbish! I said that in return I would like 3 days work from the digger to enlarge the pond (near 2nd tee). The digger driver enquired if I let the tennis court out? I said I had never thought about it. He said that he had

constructed several pays and play projects for farmers and landowners in East Anglia, tennis courts, bowling greens and pitch and putt/ par 3 golf courses.

In due course, the application for the barn conversions was turned down and I was outbid for the land! The farm business would have seen me through to retirement OK but not an income for Gavin as well. I started to think about diversification.

In 1989 the R&A at St Andrews published a well publicised report, 'The Demand for Golf to the year 2000'. In it they concluded that the UK was some 700 golf facilities short of what they felt was needed to satisfy demand.

About the same time there was an article in the 'Farmers Weekly' about a farmer and his son, in Sussex, who were keen golfers and found they couldn't join any of the local clubs, they were all over subscribed. With their landlord's permission they had cut out a simple 9-hole course on some of the farm's meadows. From a low-cost base, it had proved successful.

It was this series of disappointments & coincidences that started me thinking about possibly building a golf course. At this time, I had never walked on a golf course let alone play golf!

In 1991 construction began



& in 1992 we opened our doors....



*David Simkins*

## Senior Section

**Seniors still telling tall stories....**

Captain Brian is continuing to keep in touch with seniors- even if he, along with Lofty, have been the butt of their cartoon jokes!



(Pictures by John Langridge!)

## Ladies Section

### Ladies challenges: -

The Pleasant Ladies WhatsApp Group has been very active. In response to a challenge from the Lady Captain, 8 ladies submitted poems with the winner Susanne Milan penning the following; -

#### No Golf This Spring

Hello Captain, Hello playmates  
Here I am stuck behind my gates.

Oh how I miss a chance to play  
A round of golf on this Thursday.  
Oh let me out, let me play  
This is what I dream to say.

Here we are now well into spring  
Gazing at nature's wondrous bling.  
What a shame we cannot share  
Our lovely gardens no longer bare.

Trees in bud, the Daffodils are out  
Now the birds are starting to scout.  
Searching for materials to build their nests  
With mother nature aiding their quests.

They do not know how we feel  
Stuck in this world so surreal.  
Dawn to dusk they sing and chatter  
For them this Virus does not matter!

Perhaps when we say farewell to Spring  
Our clubs once again we can swing.  
When standing at last on our first Tee  
We can now all shout with joy and glee!!

The Arts/Crafts challenge saw entries as diverse as a child's patchwork floor cushion cover and a toddler's knitted jumper but the winner was Anne Bolland with a drawing of her dog Reg.



The current challenge is to learn a number of phrases in a new language. So, when we all meet

up again, we will be speaking in many tongues, among them... Bantu.

Ann White would like to thank all the ladies who sent her pictures of flowers from their gardens making up a virtual bouquet on her 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. The pictures have since been put into a photo book for her by Alison.



## Junior Section

We're busy studying!!

## Club History

What do you know of Club history?

What year was this?



Name the players who have held the Junior and Club Championships at the same time. (It has happened 3 times)

Name 3 members who have been both Club and Senior Captain. This is one of them in disguise...



What year did the 4<sup>th</sup> hole change in length to incorporate the then new pond?

Who do you recognize from the first Lady Captain's Day in 1993?



On a golf break we had to impersonate another MPGC member. Who was impersonating whom?



## Rules Stuff

In future there may be a relaxation of a few rules to accommodate social distancing but most will remain the same so now is a good time to brush up on your knowledge.

Download the R&A App on your phone. There you can view video explanations of rules and regularly test your knowledge of those rules.

Or go to the R&A Website where you can browse the rules and then take the Level 1 exam online. You even get a certificate!

Please let us know if you pass the exam.

## Course Rating

What usually keeps Di busy this time of year.....

This time of year, the County Course Rating Team, of which I am a member can usually be found assessing golf courses in Bedfordshire. Every course has to be reassessed at least once every 10 years, We normally do 3-4 courses per year but because of World Handicapping System coming in November 2020 we were due to visit 5 courses this summer.

We go armed with measuring wheels, laser range finders, altimeters and stimpeters. We make measurements and assessments that are fed into a spreadsheet which calculates the course rating, bogey rating and finally the slope rating of a course.

*The course rating is the evaluation of the difficulty of the course for a scratch golfer.*

*The bogey rating is the playing difficulty of the course for a Bogey golfer (handicap 20-24).*

*Slope Rating indicates the relative difficulty of a course for non-scratch golfers compared to the scratch golfer.*



It is important that we carry out the rating in a consistent and objective manner using a set of established procedures.

Courses are assessed using a set of parameters that define the distance that a player can on average carry with their shots off the tee and off the fairway in normal conditions. These distances are different for scratch and bogey golfers, and different for men and Women.

We have as a starting point, a Certificate of Measurement that gives the accurate length of each hole on the course for a particular set of tees as measured by a qualified surveyor. We then determine the

Effective Playing Length (EPL) of each hole by making corrections for roll, elevation, dogleg or layup, prevailing wind etc.

To do this we measure out from the tee to the expected landing zone for a standard bogey golfer. Their normal shot is assumed to carry 180 yards then roll a further 20 yards. But if the landing zone is lower in elevation than the tee it would carry further and if the ground is sloping away it would also roll further, thus shortening the EPL of the hole.

Alternatively, if the landing zone is higher than the tee the ball might carry less far and the EPL may be lengthened.

We also have to consider doglegs that may result in a player either cutting a corner or having to lay-up. Either could change the EPL.

At each landing zone we record the following obstacle factors: -

**Topography** - is your stance affected by slopes or mounds, is the shot to the green up or down hill making club selection harder

**Fairway** - how wide is it, does it slope away to one side, causing the ball to roll off into rough, effectively reducing the width of the fairway for example.

**Recoverability and Rough** - this evaluates the probability of missing the target or green and the difficulty of recovery e.g. what depth is the rough- are there deep hollows or mounds?

**Bunkers** - their proximity to the landing zone or the green, the

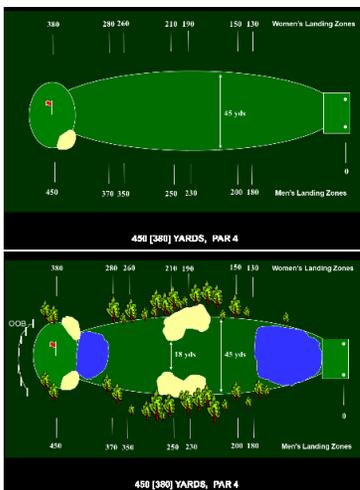
difficulty of recovery from them. Would they cause you to lay-up? What is their depth? Do they have revetted faces?

**Out of Bounds/Extreme Rough**- how close is the OB or any extreme rough where a ball may be lost or unplayable?

**Penalty Areas** - their distance from landing zones or greens, do they have be crossed?

**Trees** - Size, density and distance from the landing zone or the green, the length of shot to the target and the difficulty of recovery.

We repeat this for each shot of a Scratch and a Bogey player for each set of tees. For the approach shot to the green we also consider the green size, the approach shot length, green surface visibility, firmness, and contours and we measure the speed using a stimpmeter.



Each obstacle factor is assigned a value between 0-10. In the examples above, the first hole would have a very much lower set of obstacle factors than the

2<sup>nd</sup> hole, where there is water to carry, bunkers reducing the landing zone width, trees affecting recovery from wayward shots and out of bounds behind the green.

The obstacle factor values for all holes are added together and used with the EPL to calculate the course rating, bogey rating and slope ratings.

Finally, our assessments are vetted and approved by England Golf, before the results are released to the Club.

For example – The Millbrook Golf Club, White Tees for men has

- Par: - 74
- Course Rating: - 73.3
- Bogey Rating: - 98.4
- Slope Rating: - 135

Until the WHS is operation the Course Rating is rounded to the nearest integer to give a Standard Scratch Score (SSS) of 73.

This shows that it is quite a difficult course for the bogey golfer who, playing off 20 handicap, is expected to go round on average in 98. In future under WHS the use of Slope Rating will take this into account.

Mount Pleasant is likely to be assessed in early spring next year, when we will be able include the new 9 holes in the assessment. Until then we will continue to have a temporary SSS and from November a temporary Slope Ratings under WHS.

Carrying out these course assessments has certainly made me think more about risk and reward when playing courses. I did say think, that doesn't mean I necessarily do anything different!!

*Di*

## Charities

**No golf but we can still raise money for charity**

Enclosed with this newsletter is a 'Name the golfer' quiz. Please email your entries to me. Please make a donation to a charity of your choice & let me know which it is.

Closing date for entries is 21<sup>st</sup> May 2020. With a random draw of correct entries to win a bottle of wine.

## Next Issue

**Next time in Pleasant Times which we hope will be soon.....**

- MPGC plans for restart

Plus, your stories.

If anyone has any stories, memories, poems, pictures or photos they would like us to include next time, please email to [di.f.little@gmail.com](mailto:di.f.little@gmail.com).

***Thanks to everyone who has contributed to this issue.***