

How a passionate co-owner, together with the greenkeeping team, triggered a turnaround in fortunes for a club in South Yorkshire



# At home on the Grange

**Grange Park Golf Club is an 18 hole, par 71 parkland course located in Rotherham. Its Fred Hawtree design was completed in 1972 and it opened as a municipal course.**

Speaking to co-owner Richard Townley, it's evident that his passion for the golf course has resulted in a huge turnaround for the Club during the last ten years. He learnt to play on the course as a boy beginning at 12 years of age on a £7 ticket, his first lessons taught by the club professional Eric Clark who is still on hand to pass on his skills today.

Grange Park also has the good fortune to work closely with Peter Cowen – one of Europe's leading golf coaches - as his Golf Academy and Driving Range is located on the original Grange Park site.

Richard has enormous enthusiasm for the game of golf and so co-owning the golf course really is a dream come true.

In 2005 new life breathed into Grange Park. Richard and his business associate Steve Gillott acquired the golf course and it emerged as a private club with a year on year investment totalling in excess of £1.3 million.

During tough economic times and when other clubs are struggling to gain new members, Grange Park is thriving and continues to grow. A busy function suite and clubhouse is well supported, due to quality entertainment and fun events. These have all contributed to the financial wellbeing of the club, which in turn means that investment in the golf course is viable.

Grange Park is also licensed as a wedding venue with its perfect setting. Weddings are now conducted at the club and the first ceremony took place in August. Celebrations

ABOVE: Richard, David and Steve discussing tournament preparation

are held in the newly erected marquee overlooking the 9th hole, with spectacular views of the Yorkshire countryside towards Sheffield and beyond.

February 2013 saw Grange Park and Agronomic Services Ltd first meet when David Snowden conducted an Educational Seminar in conjunction with BIGGA.

The event - held at Grange Park - was very well supported by BIGGA members and everyone who attended learnt more about "The Importance of Oxygen".

Following on from that day, the two decided to work together.



It became clear that the team at Grange Park really wanted to make a change and this represented a challenging period for the Head Greenkeeper Steve Pickering and his team. He and his colleagues adopted new methods including foliar feeding and together with David Snowden they have tackled several issues with very pleasing results.

The desire to take the golf course to the next level and make the overall golfing experience even better meant that Richard was keen to use Floratine Product's new technology and this is why he chose to work with David.

Richard said: "David's expertise and level of service is second to none, and he is always available at the end of the phone day and night. It's wonderful to have that support."

Soil and water samples were taken and analysed using Analync which is the most comprehensive independent testing available to the sports turf industry.

This enabled David to diagnose with accuracy specific areas that needed addressing. A road map was created for the team with the aim of improving the efficiency of the root zone and plant health and this has led to dramatic results.

One of the most significant changes to the agronomic approach has been the considerable reduction in fungicide with only one preventative spray in 12 months. The need to hollow core has also been reduced resulting in less disruption of play.

This has been achieved with the introduction of a cultural approach using new products such as Oxy Rush and Thatch Buster to combat Thatch and Black Layer combined with proactive Greenkeeping practices.

Steve has embraced the spray techniques and said: "The spray plans are easy to follow and tank mixing is simple using a number system to ensure perfect results every time." Steve's personal pride in the course and enjoyment of the job is evident.

He communicates regularly with David and a spray schedule is in place which is continually updated to fit in with the weather and needs of the club.

Steve left the mining industry to begin his career in greenkeeping and has continued to gain qualifications throughout his time working in the industry.

With this new approach Steve has taken the time to learn about foliar feeding and Floratine products and the greens are continually improving.

When you ask Richard about the secret to success at Grange Park in a time when many clubs are looking for answers he refers to a hands on approach, how he still enjoys cutting the grass alongside the rest of the greenkeeping team and how the whole family are involved in the operation.

It's clear too that Richard has a head for business and we are delighted to learn that "revenues are up by 30% on green fees since working with Agronomic Services Ltd."

Richard added: "Fantastic feedback from visiting societies also reinforces the visible results achieved since our decision to work with David."

As we come to the end of our visit three teenagers arrive on a green to hole their putts, immaculately dressed and observing true golfing etiquette.

It's clear to us that the future at Grange Park is secure for the next generation of golfers.