

NEW GOLF CLUBS

CASTLEWARDEN HAS THE ORDINARY GOLFER IN MIND

By Colm Smith

The constant and phenomenal growth of the game of golf over the past decade or so has created a demand for facilities unprecedented in the history of the game and there is concern all round that the supply is not meeting that demand.



The impressive clubhouse at Castlewarden is a period house which dates back to 1640.



Officers of the new Castlewarden golf club, from left, Noel Heterich, president, Eoin O'Kelly, vice-captain, Brid Neary, lady captain, and Brian Tighe, hon. secretary.

There are several new courses being built and many others planned in Ireland but a number are of the up-market country club style which will be beyond the financial reach of the ordinary person.

New developments like Mount Juliet in Kilkenny, the Kildare Club at Straffan, Waterford Castle and Adare Manor are of the exclusive variety and will certainly enhance the international reputation of the country as a golfing paradise.

The great need is to cater for the growing numbers of Irish people who want to play the game at a cost within their means.

Castlewarden Golf and Country Club is a new development with such a client in mind. The location is a townland near the village of Rathcoole just a few miles to the north of Naas and about 500 yards from the dual carriage that links Dublin with Kildare.

One man greatly excited about the prospect is Tommy Halpin, one of the country's best known club professionals. Tommy has spent most of his working life around Kildare clubs moving to Naas after serving his time with Nicky Lynch in Sutton, and, latterly, at Bodenstown.

He has been a professional for 25 years which included a term as a tournament professional. He realised that there were better things in the golf game than trying to eke out a living on the rat race that is the European circuit.

Instead he concentrated on being a club professional and limited his playing ambitions to the Irish Region tournaments. Now, he has the opportunity to fulfil a lifetime ambition by designing a brand new golf course.

He has been contracted as club professional, course manager and designer at Castlewarden. "It is a real



Club professional and course designer Tommy Halpin, with the site for the bowling and putting greens in the background.

challenge and one I am really enjoying. The finished product will be a little gem, and when it has matured the 18th hole will be one of the most talked about holes in the country."

Tommy has been in on the project since the start. "Myself and a few friends had been talking about building a course for a number of years. We had looked at a lot of land around the area but it is only recently that this particular patch became available and it is ideal for a golf course."

Capital, of course, was needed in a hurry but there was little difficulty raising the initial cash. The purchase price of the land was £508,500. Life membership was offered to 30 people at £3,000 each and 20 family life memberships were offered at £5,000 each, all of which were snapped up.

There are already a total of around 300 members with the entrance fee set at £1,200 and an annual subscription of £200. "We really did not have much of a problem raising the money initially and we do not anticipate any

problem in the future. By the time the whole place is finished there will be a fine clubhouse which will contain all the usual facilities and it is expected that tennis, squash and badminton courts will be added," says Halpin.

THREE NINES

The club will be on approximately 145 acres of pasture land which, Halpin says, needed the minimum of artificial drainage. "For instance we were able to continue work through the wet periods where other developments were at a standstill. I expect people to be playing on the course this month but it will not be completed until the middle of 1991.

"Once the first 18 are completed and in play I then intend to design another nine which will give us three loops and allow us to rest some of the holes from time to time," he adds.

Apart from the 18 which runs along side the impressive entrance avenue, the last has no trees but with the aid

of the Department of Forestry it is intended to plant between £5,000 and £10,000 worth of trees of varying shapes and colours.

"The 18th," says Tommy, "will be something special. It will be 580 yards with a dogleg to the left but the trees along the avenue will eliminate the opportunity to cut the corner with the second shot. It will be a great finishing hole."

The period house, which was once the property of the well-known Pallister family, dates back to 1640, and one of the features around the 10th, 13th and 15th holes will be an ancient moat on which there is a preservation order. The house will be restored in time with the top floor containing a lounge and dining room that will give expansive views of the course and countryside.

It is an indication of the demand for moderately priced golf clubs that Castlewarden is already close to its capacity and may soon be forced to introduce a waiting list. It is certainly a healthy situation. □