

ON SITE

Dorset drama

Adam Lawrence takes a look at the restoration of Harry Colt's dramatic Broadstone course

Heathland golf is associated, above all else, with the belt of sandy land that occupies much of the counties of Surrey and Berkshire, to the south and west of London. Every golfer knows of Sunningdale, Wentworth and the rest, and every set of course rankings confirms that the region is home to a large proportion of Britain's best inland golf courses.

Heath may be synonymous with Surrey and Berkshire, but they aren't its only homes. Across much of southern England, as well as in France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany, lowland heath exists in substantial quantities, though pretty much everywhere it is an ecosystem in decline, as agriculture and development compete for land.

Aside from the Surrey area, though, Britain's greatest cluster of heath is on the south coast,

to the west of the city of Southampton, as anyone who has taken the main road across the top of the New Forest could attest. The view from the A31 is enough to set any golfer on edge: hundreds of acres of purple heather and tall pines. So it is no surprise that the area also contains a cluster of outstanding heathland golf courses.

Foremost among the courses of Dorset is Broadstone, located to the north of the port town of Poole. As with many of the Surrey courses, one's first view of Broadstone is misleading: the entrance appears to be in a conventional suburb, and it is only after a few holes that the course moves out onto the wide open heath, and the property reveals its drama.

Tom Dunn created the Broadstone course back in 1898, but today's layout is the work of Harry Colt, and was one of the last pieces of work the great architect completed before the

outbreak of the First World War. Like so many of Colt's courses, though, time and neglect have dulled Broadstone's impact: tree growth has choked out the heather in many areas, while also eliminating many of the grand vistas golfers of a century ago would have known.

Now, though, the club has committed to bringing some of those vistas back. Broadstone has appointed Dutch architect Frank Pont, whose practice has seen him specialise in Colt's work, to lead a renovation of the course, focusing on bunker strategy and style, as well as tree removal and heather regeneration.

Pont is a year into what will be a three to four year project, but already the results are starting to show through. Working with the club's own grounds crew under head greenkeeper Martin Coward, and also deploying the skills of American shaper Jeff



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Pont's new-look fourteenth hole (main picture) recaptures the grandeur of Colt's original (top).
Below: the restored bunkers on the eighth hole

Stein, Pont has already transformed the short par four fifth hole and returned the sixth, a classic Colt par three, to the level of visual drama the original architect intended.

At the fifth, substantial tree removal has returned the hole to the width of the original design, revealing some of Colt's bunkers that had been overgrown by pines and brambles. In addition, Stein has recreated a huge cross-bunker that dominates the view from the tee, and sets the golfer a simple challenge: can he carry the bunker, or should he lay up?

A similar transformation has taken place at the up and down par four fourteenth. Colt set the hole up with a small bunker in the middle of the fairway, but at some point in the past the bunker had been grassed over. Pont has put it back – while at the same time widening the fairway closer to its original dimensions – and a hole that

always had visual appeal now offers the same strategic question Colt intended.

Pont said: “Broadstone is one of the grandest canvasses Harry Colt ever got to work his magic on. The course has the scale of Gleneagles, a beautiful and varied routing, and as one would expect from Colt, a set of very good par three holes.”

Pont added: “The work at Broadstone has many similarities to what we did at Tandridge in England and De Pan in the Netherlands. Our aim is to reinstate the original strategy of the individual holes while at the same time restore the beauty of Colt's very specific bunkering style. In my view Broadstone should really be among the top 50 UK courses, and it is our challenge to help it achieve its full potential.”

If anything, Pont is downplaying the scale of the Broadstone property. It has,

in this author's view, many similarities with Sunningdale, where, of course, Colt was secretary for many years. It shares the same sense of scale and openness that characterises many parts of Sunningdale, and the ground's undulations are similarly massive. Broadstone, though not especially long, is emphatically a big course, and, if one could pick it up and drop it in Surrey, it would surely be considered at least the equal of many of that county's top courses. Pont's restoration has already made a dramatic start, but if the project is brought to a successful conclusion, I would say that UK top 50 would be a modest goal. **GCA**

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