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ROYAL HAGUE

THE HAGUE, HOLLAND

WEBSITE: www.khgcc.nl

GREEN FEE GUIDE: ●●●●

DESIGNER: Harry Colt, Charles Alison, John Morrison, Frank Pont

A huge jump for Royal Hague, but one which it fully deserves as a result of the work carried out on all 18 greens by Frank Pont. In truth, it could have been rated higher in the past with several respected judges strongly arguing its case for inclusion in the top 10 in previous years. So this rise has long been touted. It was Charles Alison who carried out much of the original design and as Pont explains on the opposite page, he has enormous respect for his work on this rugged landscape.



HOW I REFURBISHED ROYAL HAGUE

BY FRANK PONT



When Royal Hague was built in 1938 the surrounding dunes were relatively barren – the course was nicknamed ‘the Pine Valley of Europe’ – so they decided to transport fertile, clayish soil on to the greens, tees and fairways.

This worked fine in the following decades and allowed for golf to be played in this otherwise barren landscape, but it later made the fairways on this linky course too soft in winter.

The old clay layer had sunk so deep after 70 years of topdressing on the greens that it had become an impenetrable layer that could not be broken down with normal maintenance equipment.

The club followed the advice of leading agronomists to rebuild all 18 greens. I was delighted to provide the architectural and Colt/Alison expertise on this project.

My goals were two-fold: firstly, to restore the 13 greens that were still original as accurately as possible; secondly, to create putting surfaces for the five greens that had been changed or moved over the years, so they’d look and play like original Alison greens. To this end, all the greens were painstakingly measured in 3D, thereby allowing us to rebuild them in exactly the same form.

We copied his large, sand-faced green-side bunkers by studying old aerial pictures of the course. And we restored the grassy hollows he carefully positioned around the greens; these had become overgrown and filled-in over the years.

Restoring the original greens was rewarding, but the highlight of our project, however, was designing and building the new ones.

The first of the new greens was on the 2nd, which went from a small surface to one 50 per cent larger to give the player hitting into the green with the longer shot more room to land, while making the longer hitter’s ‘blind’ wedge shot into the green an even harder proposition.

The 7th hole was also too small, so we lowered the green surface by about a metre, which created just enough extra space on the right side to make the total green surface large enough.

The 13th was out of character, with a two-tiered structure and double-flanking bunkering left and right of the green – clear indications it wasn’t an original green. So on this difficult par 4 usually played into the wind, we gave more space to land a long-iron and to improve the odds of balls staying on the surface. We moved the green back, making it significantly longer in the process, while the entire left side and back is defended by three, huge grassy

hollows that gather most of the less-accurate shots.

The 16th is a short par 4 and the green had a large pine tree right next to it. Many members liked it, but it wasn’t on the original design and was a perennial maintenance nightmare. The tree had to go, to be replaced by a new bunker. The valley before the green was widened, so shots into the green that were short, including drives, would roll all the way down to the right of the fairway.

The final par 3, the 17th, is the last of Royal Hague’s new greens. The previous green was poorly visible from the tee and only yielded a few interesting pin positions. We wanted the front part of the green to slope upward to enhance visibility from the tee and the back-left part to be lower than the top to create a hard-to-hit target. We also wanted three bunkers, each with various degrees of difficulty and flashed-sand faces. Low, grassy hollows behind and to the right of the green were also created while we allowed a less-risky ‘bail-out’ area in the front left of the green.

The putting surfaces are now back to their original high standards and present firm and fast greens and the club now possesses one of the most exciting inward nine holes one could ever hope to play. The ‘sleeping beauty’ that Alison created has truly woken up; may she live a long and happy life.

