

TEE BOX

# Royal Dublin completes bunker overhaul

CDP project sees a return to Colt's original approach of larger but fewer hazards.







*Renovated greenside bunkers on the fourth hole at Royal Dublin*

**Clayton, DeVries & Pont (CDP) has completed a bunker renovation project at The Royal Dublin Golf Club in Ireland, which has seen hazards rebuilt to a style closer to Harry Colt’s work on the course in the 1920s.**

Dublin Golf Club was founded in 1885 and moved to its present location on Bull Island in 1889. Two years later, it received its royal patronage from Queen Victoria. Following damage inflicted to the course while it was used as a rifle and artillery range in the First World War, it was rebuilt and redesigned by Colt. In the 2000s, Martin Hawtree completed a renovation and lengthening of the course, also moving previously low-lying green complexes above the water table.

By 2019, a member survey had raised issues relating to playability, presentation, safety, sand consistency and the number of bunkers. The club asked CDP to study the hazards. “Their enthusiasm for the project, professionalism, and knowledge of Harry Colt were three key factors for us selecting CDP to oversee our bunker project,” said general manager Jeff Fallon.

“The club felt that there were too many bunkers,” said Frank Pont, who completed the audit with Hendrik Hilgert and with input from Mike Clayton. “There were 94. A lot were very steep, and some were small and pot bunker-ish, which made it hard for members to get in and out. Given that there were so many, players would often find themselves in a few during a round, leading to a general feeling that the course was quite tough.”





*The new bunkering on the short par-four sixteenth*

“Frank and the team found historical photos which allowed them to track the changes from Colt’s work in the 1920s all the way through to the present day,” said Fallon. “They made regular visits and met with key stakeholders to further develop their local knowledge of the site. The results of the audit clearly showed that the club had moved away from Colt’s philosophy of designing severe for the scratch player, but sympathetic for the bogey golfer. The audit also highlighted that we lacked asymmetry of defence, which was another of Colt’s principles, and we had increased the number of bunkers from 70 to 94.”

Photography from before the Second World War gave Pont an insight into Colt’s work, and coastal survey photos from the late 1940s confirmed the bunkers were originally bigger, and there were less of them. “There were somewhere in the region of 60 to 70 bunkers,” said Pont. “In addition to them being bigger, they also had a

more irregular shape. Prior to our work, bunkers were around 20 square metres on average, while Colt’s looked to be more like 60 square metres.

Pont and his colleague Hendrik Hilgert presented the firm’s proposals to the membership. “We proposed going back to fewer bunkers and having the greens more asymmetrically defended,” said Pont, whose renovation plan was accepted by the club.

The Covid pandemic delayed construction until October 2022, when DAR Golf Construction, who had worked on Hawtree’s renovation in the 2000s, began work, including the installation of new bunker lining. Pont and Hilgert collectively spent around 80 days on site during the project.

Individual holes were closed for play as DAR worked on them, but the remainder of the course remained open throughout the project. “In the winter, the club operates a less-than-eighteen-hole layout, so it wasn’t much of a problem that some holes were

closed for construction,” said Pont. “They used about four or five different routings, which helped us a lot as we didn’t feel a lot of time pressure and the members were kept happy. Once we finished a hole, it would be back in play quickly with some areas of ground under repair.”

The project was completed in February 2023 and the last of the bunkers reopened at the start of May.

“Feedback to date has been very positive,” said Fallon. “All the issues noted during the survey have been addressed. And following their engagement with the CDP team, our members have also broadened their knowledge of Colt’s design philosophies.”

Pont added: “Bunkers are now better placed to challenge low handicap golfers who seek birdies. Some have said that it feels like there are more even though we took plenty out! At the same time, the course has undoubtedly become more forgiving for the average golfer.” **GCA**