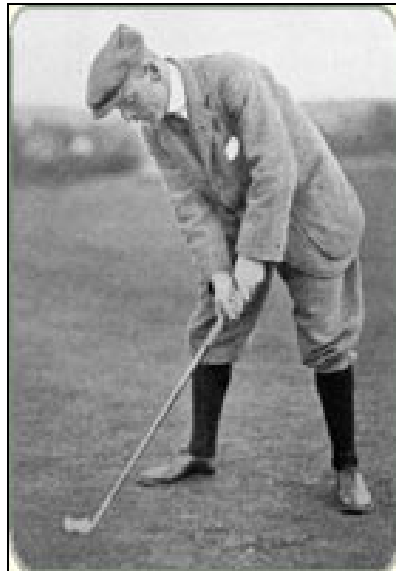


*'I consider that it will be possible to make a course affording an excellent test and, at the same time, one that will give the maximum of pleasure to players.'*

H.S. Colt in his report to the founders of the club.



*Harry Colt golfing*

Ken Kearney Golf Design was appointed by Belvoir Park Golf Club, Belfast to carry out a Golf Course Improvement Plan.

Belvoir Park GC is one of the very best parkland golf courses anywhere... I mean, anywhere... It has a history the envy of any golf club. Belvoir Park was designed by Harry Colt in 1927. The routing has remained largely unchanged since then. As is typical of Colt, who routed golf courses better than anybody, the routing is superb in making best use of all the natural features. There are 5 stunning par 3 holes, all very typical of Harry Colt.

Many changes have been made over the years, some good, some bad and some in between. The course hosted the 1953 Irish Open won by Bobby Locke, the Irish Amateur Mens Close Championship in 2008 and recently hosted the British Ladies Seniors Amateur Championship.

Following an extensive assessment / interview process, Ken Kearney was appointed as the club architect to carry out the work. The Golf Course Improvement Plan is complete and now in the hands of the club.

The brief given by the club was one of the best briefs I have seen and embraced all that is good about golf and the land on which we play the game.

The brief:

- Develop a 5 – 10 Year Course Improvement Plan
- Develop the golf course for the enjoyment of members and visitors
- Consider sensible budgets
- Proper planning
- Harry Colt influence as the original architect 1927
- Implement the proposals – assist the club in the detailed design, preparation of technical specifications, bills of quantities, tender documents and supervision of the proposed remodel / restoration works

The document took about 6 weeks to complete. It is broad ranging in its assessment and analysis of the golf course. To give an idea of the extent of the work, the contents page of the document read as follows:

1. Introduction
2. The Starting Point
3. A review of Colt's work and the strategies and ethos of his design at Belvoir Park
4. The routing
5. Tees – Ladies and Gents and others
6. Greens – original and new
7. Bunkers – fairways and greenside
8. Fairways and rough – mowing regimes - definition
9. Woodlands / vegetation – how they impact on aesthetics and the playing strategy
10. Practice facilities
11. Paths
12. Hole-by-hole analysis to include proposals for improvement
13. The Ladies Course
14. Balance of Par / SSS / Course set-up
15. The strategy in moving forward
16. How the "Improvement Plan" can fit into the golfing calendar.
17. Estimated costs
18. Conclusion+

While every aspect of the golf course was analysed and proposals for improvement offered where appropriate, the meat of the document is in Section 12 where every hole is considered from tee to green; from paths to seats; from tee locations to trees; from bunkers to green sizes and contours; the Colt influence; from drainage to irrigation and in particular the strategy of the golf hole.

As a Colt enthusiast, it was critical to me (and the club) to remain honest to the Colt influence, much of which is still visible at Belvoir Park GC. However, much of his influence has been lost over the years. I was anxious to recognise it and "restore" it with modern technology and consideration for the modern era in which we play golf.

The golf course was assessed and in doing this, I considered Colt and the strategies he used at Belvoir Park in 1927. He did not have a formula / template for designing golf courses, thankfully, but this makes it sometimes difficult to recognise his strategy. Colt helped us in a way he probably was not aware of at the time. His methods of working and applying his design principles were so methodological and consistent; any deviation of these rules enables someone familiar with Colt's work to quickly spot where alterations have been made. It was entirely possible and mostly easy, to see where the design had been altered or where greens / bunkers had been remodeled. I am suitably positioned to offer my expertise in such situations.

Much of the plan is based around old photographs of the golf course. These photographs were very useful in allowing us to look back in time at Colt's vision for the golf course: the look, the style and the strategy and how it looked back in the day. From the old photographs we generated images of what the proposed remodel works may look like. The use of such images is useful in providing members with a picture of what the remodel work might look like post development.

The proposed remodel of the golf course embraces all of the Colt philosophies. In particular, it is proposed to restore the strategies of the golf course which have been lost over time. Colt was one of the greatest (if not the greatest) architects of all time... why should we second-guess him.

Most encouraging for me was the clubs enthusiasm for recognizing the Colt influence and taking on board the opportunity they now have to restore a Harry Colt masterpiece. It is sometimes difficult to imagine how one can make a great golf course, even better. This is most definitely the case at Belvoir Park and I look forward to being a part of it.

I am most grateful to the members and committee at Belvoir Park GC for entrusting me with drawing up the plans for the improvement of their golf course. The implementation of the program is the next piece of work and this will be the exciting part. Colt would be very proud to see the cobwebs knocked off his work and it being brought back to life.

Colt's stated philosophy was "*the real test of a golf course: is it going to live?*" It is fair to say that Belvoir Park GC has lived but is going to get a new lease of life very soon. Colt would be pleased.

Ken Kearney  
September 2011.