

It was one of the West Country's most extraordinary sporting rises: the humble farm that became host to the world's leading sports stars. Now a new book tells one of golf's great tales – and the *Indy's* John Collings has been reading it...

Could top events return? 'Of course'

After successfully hosting the Benson & Hedges competition, the Weetabix Women's Open and the PGA Cup (a Ryder Cup-style tournament featuring the best club professionals from the UK and America), the tide of star-studded players fetching up at St Mellion in big-name contests seemed to go out.

But, according to co-author Paddy Flavin, it could come in again at any time.

"It's all about money," he said. "I've heard it said many times that the top golfers didn't like St Mellion, but that's absolute nonsense. Nonsense. They'd play on the M25 if the money was there."

"All St Mellion needs is to attract a sponsor and the big competitions would be back."

"It cost something like £612,000 to stage the Benson & Hedges in 1995 but St Mellion lost out to The Oxfordshire who came up with £912,000 – and the last time it was played in 2003, the cost was around £1.5million. It's all about the money."

David Moon, St Mellion's golf manager since 1993, agrees. Moon, who taught the Bonds to improve their own games, said that they were ready and willing to host another major tournament.

Nicklaus, himself, always believed in his Cornish course. "I knew it was going to be good, but not this good," he said. "It's everything I hoped for and more. St Mellion is potentially the finest golf course in Europe."

Airport grounded

One of the spin-off aspirations arising out of St Mellion Golf Club's initial success was the Bonds' plan to create an airport at Viverdon Downs on the outskirts of St Mellion village.

"I still have those plans," said Martin's son, Chris. "There would have been an airport, a third golf course, a casino and an hotel, but planning was the big bugbear. It was the only thing that really got my dad wound up."

Former director of golf Paddy Flavin said it was an eternal shame that "local people and petty councillors" never shared the Bond brothers' vision but his co-author, Michael Taylor, who covered council and planning deliberations throughout that time, felt the professional planners and the councils had adopted a view of "we've given them enough". It meant that the airport dream crashed before take off.

'Still farming to do'

Hermon Bond's son, Graham, says his father and uncle didn't unduly celebrate when, against all the odds, Jack Nicklaus actually agreed to build their new course.

"You have to remember that they were still farmers, and there was still farming to do," he said. "But, nevertheless, there was an air of tremendous excitement around."

And Chris Bond, Martin's son, said that his father didn't drink, so walking the family's dog would probably have been as close to any sort of celebration for him.

"I was young at the time and my father loved his snooker," he said. "There was a snooker table in the room and I remember seeing the (golf club) drawings covering the snooker table."

"I knew then that this was a pivotal moment for the family, because he loved his snooker."



Fields of dreams

Have you heard the one about two Irishmen, a pig breeder and a potato farmer, and the story of how a dream of professional golf became a professional golfer's dream?

Unlike many tales from the Emerald Isle, this one has no punch-line; in fact, it is set to go down in folklore as one of the most remarkable business success stories that Cornwall, if not the UK, has ever known.

St Mellion – The Bond Legacy is a new book celebrating the anniversary of the opening of the Jack Nicklaus golf course in the south east corner of the Duchy on Sunday, July 10, 1988.

Co-written by former BBC Radio Cornwall and *Western Morning News* reporter Michael Taylor and one-time director of golf at St Mellion, the Surrey-based Paddy Flavin, it is the inside story of the people behind the project, most notably the farming brothers, Hermon and Martin Bond, and the stories of those who helped turn their dream into a reality.

Many of the yarns are hilarious; others sad, and some, simply priceless. And, a bit like the game of golf itself, there's often the unexpected at every turn of this 355-page paperback.

Find out how the Bonds' bank manager, Trevor Furse, reacted when they first asked him to transfer "some money" – only a mouth-watering £50,000 – from their Liskeard account to the legendary 'Golden Bear' of golf, Jack Nicklaus; what the great man, himself, felt when he opened the door of his sprawling Palm Beach mansion in Florida to two unkempt Cornish farmers, and how Spanish golfing superstar Seve Ballesteros – never one to be known for his language skills – was once told by Hermon Bond that he spoke better English than one of his best Cornish friends!

The Bonds, somewhat reluctantly, soon moved from being down-to-earth farmers to internationally-renowned entrepreneurs, rubbing shoulders with royalty, sports stars and celebrities as they created a stunning resort complex which is now in the ownership of Crown Golf UK Ltd.

However, few fairytale stories have a happy ending. Hermon died following a heart attack on Christmas Eve, 2000. He was 64. Martin lost his fight against cancer on February 16, 2016, aged 81.



It was 1979. St Mellion Golf and Country Club was getting ready to host, for the first time, the Benson & Hedges International Open in May.

American superstar Lee Trevino was due to come to South East Cornwall to defend his B&H win at Fulford the previous year. But, would he turn up?

Trevino, one of golf's greatest, flamboyant characters and entertainers, could demand virtually anything to guarantee his appearance.

He let it be known to Len Owen, the director of special events for Benson & Hedges, that he would be insisting on



Co-authors Michael Taylor, (left), and Paddy Flavin, (right), with St Mellion's golf manager David Moon

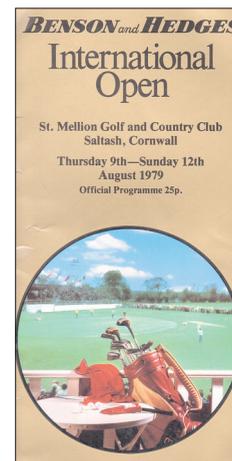
This book is not only in their memory but also salutes their unrelenting dedication in convincing Nicklaus, a figure far removed from their Cornish comfort zone, that St Mellion should be the site of the first course he had designed in the UK; one that has gone on to become known all the world over.

Michael Taylor said the Bonds' 'business plan' could be summed up in five words.

"'I think this will work,' one of them had said," Taylor recalled.

"They were out in the fields and the other one said: 'Well, let's crack on with it, then.'"

The Bonds, added Flavin, were an excellent double act – Hermon with a big personality; a gregarious character and a wicked sense of fun, and Martin, more reflective and quieter. "But as a double act they were good, very, very good," he said.



The Bonds created their first course (now known as the Kernow Course) in 1973 before wooing Nicklaus with their enthusiasm and faith.

Taylor said: "I think Nicklaus was probably so p****d off by being pestered by the Bonds that he asked them to send £50,000 through a telegraphic (bank) transfer to prove they meant business."

"Hermon had no problem with the £50,000 – but it incurred a bank charge of £37.50 and that really got up his nose!"

The publicity generated by the opening game on the new Nicklaus Course, played out by the sport's superstars of the day, Nicklaus, Tom Watson, Nick Faldo and Sandy Lyle, on a wet afternoon on July 10, 1988, came about by accident.

"The BBC were only planning to show action from the first tee but it was so wet that day that all the John Player (cricket) live coverage was washed out, so they decided to follow the golf," recalled Flavin.

Taylor and Flavin spent many hours with the Bonds and enjoyed unprecedented access to their families and the vast collection of documents relating to the development of St Mellion. "The first time I met them was in late 1976 in the still-to-be-completed (original) clubhouse at St Mellion," recalls Taylor. "It was clear, even then, that these were two men who had set their sights firmly on revolutionising sporting facilities in the West Country, and attracting the best golfers in the world to Cornwall."

"They achieved their goal and Paddy and I decided to get together to ensure there is now a permanent record of how Martin and Hermon went about the mammoth task of transforming farmland into a world-famous golf and leisure resort."

Said Flavin: "Martin and Hermon Bond were true visionaries. They knew intuitively how to harvest relationships as successfully as they farmed the land."

● *St Mellion – The Bond Legacy*, with a foreword by Peter Alliss, is available from Amazon Books (£12.97) and Kindle Books (£9.97), or from the St Mellion and Lanhydrock golf clubs.

Room service: one emergency suite for Mr Trevino, coming right up

the luxury of a suite of rooms at St Mellion.

There was only one problem with that. St Mellion didn't have any suite of rooms! Just a modest 24-bedroom hotel, mainly paid for by the Bonds' sale of their precious pigs.

The Bond brothers came up with the answer...

At the end of one of the corridors of the hotel, they'd take the doors off the last two rooms, one on each side of the corridor, and put a partition and a door in the corridor to turn the two rooms into a makeshift 'suite of rooms'.

The double bed was taken out of one of the rooms and replaced by a settee and other furniture to make the room into a lounge area.

But when Trevino went into his 'suite of rooms' he exclaimed to his agent and manager Derrick Pillage: "What the hell's this!"

Derrick recalled: "When Tre went in, I just had to tell him what had happened. Tre just burst out laughing."

"But that was Martin and Hermon at their very best. They never gave in to anything. They'd never be beaten."

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