

Bare Truth

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From a career in sport to the first years of Bare Up

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A different sort of working week

If you had told me that my working week would one day include researching a dead golf Professional, helping to sell waterproofs, discussing a club website and writing about a small travelling bear, I might have asked whether you had been in Shackleton's for too long.

Yet here we are.

It is October 2026. Bare Up has been part of my life for nearly two years, counting from the business taking shape rather than the first weekly blog. I have a portfolio of work that would be difficult to squeeze into a conventional job description. Some of it is commercial. Some involves the history of golf. Some happens behind a counter, where an apparently straightforward question can tell you more than a lengthy meeting. Much of it depends on knowing people, listening properly and following things through.

The golf is still capable of spoiling an otherwise perfectly good week.

This book is the story of how I arrived here. It begins before Bare Up, because a new business does not appear from nowhere. It carries the habits, relationships and mistakes of the person starting it. Mine brought decades in sport, brands, operations, golf and software, along with a persistent suspicion that most problems become more manageable when somebody asks a sensible question.

When I began The Bare Pit in March 2025, I wanted to share what I was doing. I did not set out to write a book. The updates were a mixture of projects, golf, family, charity, local life and whatever had annoyed or amused me that week. They included successes, delays and occasions when I needed to give myself a talking-to. Looking back, they record a change in how I understood the work itself.

At the start, the possibilities spread in all directions. By the time of the latest entry, Morecambe Golf Club, its Pro Shop and The PGA's heritage work had become the main focus. That was not a retreat from ambition. It was a clearer view of where I could contribute and where I wanted to spend my time.

For friends from golf and business, there will be familiar names and situations here. Recruitment that takes longer than expected. A promising idea waiting for somebody to make a decision. A sponsor who deserves attention after the agreement is signed. Members who love their club and disagree about what loving it requires. An old object whose real value emerges only when somebody discovers the person behind it.

There is also the life around the work. Sally Ann, family, old friends, music, a trip to Boston with Scotland and a place by the Bay that has become home. Those things belong in the story. They explain why a different way of working was worth pursuing in the first place.

I have not solved the problem of doing too much. If anything, I have discovered more enjoyable ways to do it. But I have become better at recognising the questions that matter: who needs help, what would improve their situation, and can I make a useful contribution?

Bare Up began with support when it matters. The meaning of that phrase has grown as the work has grown.

And that, with the occasional white jacket and a decent glass of wine, is the bare truth.

Before Bare

I left school in Irvine in 1982 with an interest in becoming a sports journalist. There is a certain irony in eventually finding myself writing weekly about golf, work and the people around both. It took a rather longer route than I had imagined. I cannot claim it was a carefully executed forty-year publishing strategy.

Sport was the thread. The jobs changed, the products changed and the working vocabulary changed, but sport kept appearing in one form or another. Looking back now, I see less of a neat ladder and more of an accumulation: knowledge of customers, an understanding of how businesses work, relationships that survived changes of employer, and a growing willingness to ask what a decision would mean in practice.

In 1986 I joined Wilson Sporting Goods, where I became European Credit Manager. Credit control may seem an unusual starting point for a story that leads to golf heritage and community work. It was useful training. You need to understand the numbers, but you also need to understand the people behind them. A customer relationship does not become simpler because there is an unpaid invoice involved.

I was heading credit control, rather than working as an accountant. That distinction matters. My later involvement in finance would centre on budgets, forecasts, performance and the actions needed when reality differed from the plan. I have never needed to describe myself as an accountant to recognise that a business cannot spend the same pound twice.

Wilson also gave me an early place in the sporting-goods world. In June 2026, while writing about Boston and Scotland, I found myself remembering a Wilson ball and those early career connections in Irvine. An object can bring back a period of your life with surprising force. At The PGA I would later encounter that same response in other people: a club, a trophy or a photograph bringing something much larger into focus.

Reebok followed in 1991, as UK Credit Manager. The sporting context remained, with a different business and different people. It is striking how often those people have reappeared. When Bare Up began, Sharon Jackson, an old Reebok colleague, was involved in NeuroDropIn. Decades after we had worked in the same business, that connection became part of a local charity story in Lancashire.

There is no way to plan for all of that at the time. You can, however, choose how you treat people while you are there. A job ends. A relationship may continue for thirty years.

At Pentland Brands, from 1995, my work broadened into operations, including PSG and international customer service with Berghaus. Raleigh Industries came next, from 1998 to 2001, in sales operations. Those roles added another layer to the commercial picture. A sale does not exist in isolation. Somebody has to process it, fulfil it, communicate about it and deal with whatever has gone wrong between the promise and the delivery.

That is where apparently small issues become significant. A process may make complete sense to the team that created it while being deeply irritating to the customer who has to use it. Years later, working in the Pro Shop, I would encounter the retail version: a barcode that fails, a label that creates unnecessary work, a system that needs too many steps. The setting changes. The underlying question stays familiar.

Lyle & Scott brought me into an Operations Director role in 2001. Sunderland of Scotland followed in 2005, as Sales and Marketing Director, before Glenmuir in November 2009, where I became Marketing Director. Golf was increasingly at the centre of the work. Brands needed to mean something to customers, and their promises needed to survive the weather, the shop floor and the round itself.

Sunderland also involved ownership. Sally Ann and I backed ourselves through that part of the journey. I had an ownership stake in Sunderland; I did not own SpinMe later on. Those are different experiences, and neither should be blurred into a more dramatic story. Taking a stake in a business changes your relationship with decisions. The risk is personal as well as professional. Confidence helps, but confidence does not remove the obligation to understand what you are committing to.

The international side of the golf-apparel business mattered too. Distribution and licensing require more than assuming that a successful approach at home will travel unchanged. You need people who understand their markets. You need clarity about responsibilities. And you need patience when distance, timing and different expectations complicate a discussion. When Sunderland opportunities in Australasia and the Far East returned to my working life through Bare Up, there was a substantial history behind them.

In April 2013 I became Secretary of The PGA in Scotland, based at Kings Lodge at Gleneagles. It brought me closer to the people who make golf their profession and to the organisation representing them. My departure in 2015 was for personal reasons, discussed with the Chief Executive. The relationships remained good. That mattered greatly when I returned to The PGA in a different capacity a decade later.

Scottish Golf came next, as Commercial Manager from June 2015, followed by Bunker Mentality as Sales Director in January 2017. Each move added another perspective on the game. Golf can be a product, a profession, a governing responsibility, a club business or an afternoon with friends. Trouble begins when people assume their own perspective is the only one that counts.

SpinMe, from September 2019, took me into software and imaging technology. My roles included business development in Europe, client success and Head of Growth. After years in sport and apparel, it was another opportunity to learn. Customers still needed to understand the value being offered. Teams still needed clear objectives. A sophisticated technical product did not make those human requirements disappear.

That is the career in its briefest form. There are many more stories within it, but this book is about what came next. The relevant point is that Bare Up began with experience across functions, rather than a single specialised lane. I had seen decisions from the finance side, the operations side, the commercial side and the customer side. Sometimes those sides were supposed to be working together and plainly were not.

I had also learned that knowing a lot is less useful than knowing what to ask. The most experienced person in a room can still miss something obvious. The newest person may see it immediately. A good working environment makes space for both.

By late 2024, that long career was approaching an unplanned change. I had no desire to throw away what I had learned. Equally, I did not want to recreate the same working life simply because it was familiar.

The question was what to do with the experience, the relationships and the time still ahead of me. The answer would eventually take the name of the place where we lived.

Finding a different way



A new chapter begins beside the Bay.

The end of my time at SpinMe was not the gentle, orderly transition that a career summary might suggest. Redundancy entered the picture in November 2024, and the business went into liquidation in January 2025. There was uncertainty in between. That is enough detail to explain the turning point without turning this book into an account of somebody else's business difficulties.

The people mattered. A company's ending leaves individuals with practical problems and unfinished relationships. In early January I considered an idea called SpinOff, intended to support existing SpinMe clients with a small team of former colleagues. It reflected an instinct that stayed with me: useful knowledge does not cease to exist because the organisation employing it has stopped trading.

There were other possibilities too. I could look for another conventional role. I could do less. I could try to build something that allowed me to work with different people on different problems. None of those choices came with a guarantee. The last one, however, offered a chance to shape the working week around what I could contribute and what I enjoyed.

Bare Up began taking shape in January 2025. We lived in Bare, Lancashire, and the name fitted the place. It also carried the suggestion of bearing up when things become difficult. There was room for some wordplay, which anyone who knows me will recognise as a feature rather than an unfortunate accident.

The idea behind it was more serious than the name might suggest. Support when it matters. Help at the point where experience, a conversation or a practical piece of work could make a difference. I did not need to pretend to have a universal answer. I needed to be clear about where I could help and honest about where somebody else would be better placed.

Starting a business in this phase of life has its advantages. You are not starting without a network or without evidence of what you can do. It also has its temptations. You can believe that every contact is a potential opportunity, every request should be accepted, and every quiet day signals that something has gone wrong. Experience is not a vaccination against overcommitting.

I was interested in a portfolio of work. Golf would be part of it, naturally, but there were brands, technology businesses, commercial projects and people looking for a sounding board. The early breadth was real. It was also exploratory. I had to discover which activities would remain occasional conversations and which would become substantial responsibilities.

There is a difference between incorporating a business and explaining it to the world. Bare Up was established in January. The first Bare Pit blog appeared on 4 March 2025. When I looked back a year later, both dates mattered: January for the business anniversary, March for the public record of the journey.

That first blog did not describe an empty desk waiting for a customer. It was already busy. Charity work with NeuroDropIn, a corporate golf day, developments at Morecambe Golf Club, international apparel discussions and a proposed golf-fan app were all in view. A members' survey had attracted more than 150 responses. GolfFest was being planned. I was preparing to stand for the club's Board.

The range could look rather untidy from outside. Inside it, there was a common thread. People were trying to move something forward, and I could offer experience, contacts or time. Bare Up made those contributions part of a coherent working life, even before the eventual pattern became clear.

I did not want to dress this up with an elaborate language of transformation. Most people who need help have quite enough to deal with already. They want to understand whether you have grasped the problem, whether you can do the work and whether you will tell them the truth. A new business name should make that easier, rather than adding another layer of explanation.

There were practical matters as well as the enjoyable prospect of new projects. Starting out meant thinking about the business properly, including financial advice and the support of people I trusted. Annabel, through True Potential, was part of those early conversations. Having a knowledgeable person available when you are making decisions is valuable. Pretending that independence requires doing everything alone would have been a poor start.

The website gradually developed its own family of Bare names: The Bare Facts, The Bare Market, The Mair of Bare and The Bare Pit. The weekly update gave the activity a rhythm. It required me to stop, look at what had happened and decide what was worth sharing. That was helpful discipline, even when the week had provided more unfinished business than news.

Writing publicly also makes you accountable in a quiet way. An idea mentioned in March is still there to be read when July arrives. If it has changed, stalled or disappeared, you cannot honestly write the story as if every intention became a result. Some projects did move forward. Others remained in discussion. Part of the book's value lies in that distinction.

I wanted the updates to contain a person as well as a business. Golf results, family visits, a good evening out and the occasional complaint about a train belonged alongside commercial work. Nobody I knew conducted their life in separate, sealed compartments. Work affects your mood. A visit to an old friend can change your perspective on a difficult week. A poor round can be amusing by the time you write about it, provided sufficient time has passed.

Bare itself gave the venture a sense of place. Morecambe Bay, the village, the golf club and Shackleton's were becoming part of the everyday texture of life. That mattered after a career with many roles and many locations. The business could reach elsewhere while remaining rooted in a community I enjoyed.

By the end of the first month of blogging, the first caution had already appeared: freelancers can say yes too readily. It is easy to mistake an attractive collection of opportunities for a manageable workload. I had spent years encouraging clear priorities in other people's businesses. Now I would have to apply the same discipline to my own.

I cannot claim that lesson was learned once and then neatly put away. It returned throughout the next eighteen months, usually when I had found another interesting thing to do.

Still, the essential decision had been made. I would use the experience I had, work with people I valued and make room for a different sort of contribution. Bare Up was under way.

The new boy at the club

Morecambe Golf Club quickly became a large part of the Bare Up story. The attraction was easy to understand. There was a good course, a striking setting and people who cared about the place. There was also plenty to do. A beautiful view is an asset, but it does not organise an event, recruit a manager or explain a change to members.

I was still relatively new to the local community. That can be useful. You see things before you become accustomed to them, and you have fewer inherited assumptions about why something must be done in a particular way. It can also make you overconfident. The fact that you have just noticed a problem does not mean nobody else has noticed it, or that your first proposed solution is the right one.

The members' survey was important from the outset. More than 150 responses had been received by the first blog. That represented a substantial amount of attention willingly given by people who wanted their club to prosper. It was an invitation to listen, with an obligation attached. Asking people what they think is only the beginning; they will reasonably expect to see something happen afterwards.

There were conversations with the Professional, directors and members, and a strong sense of pride in the course and the club. That pride was encouraging. It also made disagreement inevitable. If people did not care, they would be unlikely to argue about facilities, fees, food or the use of a room. The task was to understand the concern beneath the argument rather than reducing it to somebody being difficult.

In March 2025 I was elected to the Board for a three-year term. A voluntary position still carries responsibility. Members are entitled to expect serious thought, sensible decisions and a willingness to explain them. Volunteering does not provide an exemption from preparation. Nor does it make a person an expert in every part of a golf-club business.

I began looking at club-management practice and speaking with people who understood the sector. Conversations involving the GCMA, CMAE, Lancashire Golf and Kevin Fish helped widen the perspective. There is considerable knowledge available in golf if you are prepared to ask. A club does not have to repeat every other club's mistake in order to establish its independence.

The practice-area plans were one example of where enthusiasm needed structure. Members could see the benefit of improved facilities, but a proposal had to become something deliverable. There were practical considerations, people to involve and decisions to make. Simon, the Professional, brought knowledge of what golfers needed

and how the facilities would be used. My experience could complement that; it could not substitute for it.

Retail was another part of the picture. Early conversations with Simon and Emma at TGI involved support for the shop. At that stage I was looking at it mainly through a commercial lens. I had worked with brands and distribution for years. It would take my own time behind the counter in 2026 to show me some things that a higher-level discussion could not.

ClubForce, our volunteering initiative, made the work visible in a different way. Gardening, painting and maintenance are not glamorous topics for a consultancy website. They are, however, the sort of work people notice when they arrive somewhere. The condition of a place tells a story before anybody has explained its ambitions.

I joked about a volunteers' day coinciding with Sally Ann's birthday. That is the danger of putting dates into a busy diary without considering all the relevant stakeholders. In a long marriage, some stakeholders have rather more influence than the others.

There was pleasure in seeing people offer their time. A club relies on many contributions that do not arrive with an invoice or a prominent title. Some volunteers are comfortable leading a project. Others prefer a practical task and a clear instruction. Good organisation should make both contributions easier. It should also recognise that the paid staff still have jobs to do.

I would return to that boundary later. Early enthusiasm can make a volunteer think that more involvement must always be helpful. In fact, support needs to fit the circumstances. Arriving with another suggestion at the busiest moment of somebody's day may create work rather than remove it. The intention can be good while the effect is less useful.

The website was already part of the discussion. We wanted more visitors and more functions, which meant looking at how the club presented itself. A person unfamiliar with Morecambe should be able to understand what was available and what to do next. Members know where things are and whom to ask. A prospective visitor does not share that knowledge.

The same principle applied to open days and local publicity. A golf club can assume that everyone in the surrounding area knows what lies behind the entrance. Many do not. They may have an image of golf clubs formed somewhere else, years earlier. Welcoming them requires something more practical than saying the door is open.

My first Board meetings reinforced the need to listen. It is tempting to arrive with experience and immediately start applying it. Listening first helps establish the real constraints. There may be a sound reason for a decision that looks odd from outside.

There may also be a habit that has outlived its purpose. You need to distinguish between them.

Money, naturally, sat beneath many discussions. A club must maintain a course and buildings, employ people and provide a service its members value. Improving something often costs money before it produces any return. Avoiding a decision has a cost too, even when that cost is less visible. I was interested in putting a clearer framework around those choices.

What I enjoyed was the breadth. One discussion might be about a survey, the next about a charity prize, the next about visitor income. That fitted Bare Up well. The work required commercial judgement, but it also required local relationships and respect for the people who had cared for the club long before I arrived.

My early blogs were enthusiastic about the place. That enthusiasm remained, although it became better informed. The more involved I became, the more I understood the work behind a good day at the club. A golfer sees the course, the shop and the clubhouse. Behind them are systems, staff, decisions and a great deal of effort.

I had joined a Board, but I was also joining a community. That second part would turn out to be at least as important to the story.

Good people and good projects

The early Bare Up diary contained a fairly broad selection of projects. Apparel, licensing, a golf-fan app, studios, investment discussions and mentoring appeared alongside Morecambe. If anyone had asked for a simple explanation of a typical week, I might have suggested that they wait until the following week and ask again.

There was an obvious commercial reason to explore opportunities. A new business needs work. There was also a personal reason: I enjoy working out how an idea might become something useful. That is not the same as wanting to run every idea myself. Sometimes the most valuable contribution is to help somebody see what they need next and introduce them to the right person.

The golf-fan app that became part of the Diigr story offered an example. It involved digital signatures and engagement between golfers and the people they admired. Darren and Liam were among the people involved, and there were investment and development conversations. By the summer of 2025, Edinburgh and CodeBase featured in the work, with attention turning towards an MVP.

I found that combination of golf and technology interesting. Golf has a strong attachment to physical objects: balls, clubs, cards, photographs and signatures. Digital experiences introduce different possibilities, but they still need to answer a human question. What makes this meaningful to the person using it? Novelty alone wears off quickly.

Investment discussions need the same clarity. It is easy for those close to an idea to explain it using the language of the product. An investor may need to understand the customer, the problem, the evidence and the use of the money. Helping to make that account clearer is worthwhile work. It does not mean the funding is guaranteed, or that every interested person will become an investor.

One software project reached agreed funding discussions and then formal documentation during the early summer. I wrote about the value of clear objectives, agreed actions and communication. Those things can seem mundane compared with the excitement of securing support. They are what allow the excitement to survive the first practical difficulty.

Other projects remained exploratory. Sunderland licensing conversations involved Australasia and the Far East, later connecting people in Bare, Birmingham and Melbourne. I knew the brand and the sector, which helped. Even so, familiarity with a business cannot accelerate every decision. International discussions involve different

priorities and timetables. You need to maintain the relationship without treating each conversation as a completed agreement.

Apparel opportunities and investment packs also appeared. My previous ownership experience made me conscious of what people were really asking when they sought backing. A proposal can be attractive and still need sharper evidence. A founder can be committed and still need somebody to challenge the assumptions. Support is not always agreement.

The studio work brought another setting into the mix. News UK and the possibilities around a substantial studio facility featured in the spring. James Haggard became part of the wider connection. I could contribute to commercial discussions and introductions without pretending that years in golf made me an expert in every aspect of broadcasting.

That distinction mattered across the portfolio. Experience travels well when you understand its limits. It travels badly when you assume that competence in one field gives you authority over another. The questions I could ask were often transferable. The technical answers sometimes belonged to somebody else.

ShotHero came into the picture later in 2025, through Matt and Mark, with coaching and development conversations involving Oli. There were funding discussions and, eventually, possible opportunities involving The PGA. Possible is an important word. A conversation about fit is not a contract. I wanted to help the idea find a sensible route without writing its future as if it had already happened.

Nutrition was another area where established founders were considering growth after years of building their business. Eddie and Steve featured in those conversations. Helping people who already know their own product can involve less telling and more questioning. They may not need somebody to explain their sector. They may need space to consider how the next stage differs from the one that got them there.

Mentoring a friend's son, an international sportsman considering his career, provided a more personal version of that work. We used the sort of questions that test a statement rather than admire it. You have described an achievement or a possibility; so what does it mean for the next decision? The aim was to help him make sense of his own experience, rather than borrow mine as a ready-made answer.

That kind of conversation suits me. People often have much of the answer already, but it is mixed with assumptions, pressure and the noise of other people's opinions. A useful sounding board helps separate those things. It should leave the person with more ownership of the decision, rather than a dependency on the adviser.

Reconnecting with David Baxter from the Pentland years reminded me how long the relationships in this work could be. Some were new; others had accumulated over

decades. The value was not simply access. A longstanding connection carries a sense of how a person works, what they care about and whether a conversation can be candid.

There were quieter weeks and busy weeks. I learned to resist interpreting them too quickly. A full diary may contain several discussions that lead nowhere. A short meeting may produce something substantial months later. Counting activity is easy. Understanding its value takes more judgement.

By August 2025 I was beginning to ask what the next challenge should be. Leighton's appointment at Morecambe meant some work could move into capable hands. Sunderland discussions were active without requiring all my time. Diigr's funding and development process did not create a conventional full working week. Bare Up had room for another substantial responsibility.

That was an encouraging position, but it required a decision. I could keep adding possibilities indefinitely. Or I could look for something with a clearer purpose and a stronger connection to what I enjoyed. The portfolio had demonstrated that I could work differently. Now I needed to consider its shape.

The answer would come from an organisation I knew well, although the role itself would involve a very different kind of work. Before that, the club and the local community had provided a reminder that useful outcomes are not always measured in invoices.

More than a golf day



Good company, a shared purpose and a day to remember.

One of the first things Bare Up became involved in was a charity golf day. That was fitting. The new business had come out of a difficult transition, and here was a practical opportunity to help people facing difficulties of their own. It also involved golf, old contacts and a club full of people willing to contribute. There are worse ways to begin a working chapter.

NeuroDropIn was the Captains' charity at Morecambe in 2025. Sharon Jackson, from my Reebok days, was part of the connection. The charity's work and its move towards a Lancaster presence gave the fundraising a clear local purpose. This was not an abstract good cause attached to an enjoyable day; there were people and needs behind it.

Tommy and Mo, the Captains, were central to the effort. The corporate day on 2 May attracted strong support early. Teams, prizes, planning and communication all needed attention. An event that looks effortless on the day generally owes that appearance to quite a lot of effort beforehand.

My network helped with prizes. Julie Walker, a school friend associated with Golfing Gertie, contributed umbrellas. Liam provided a Scotsraig fourball. Matt at Glenmuir helped with a Ryder Cup shirt. Other people added their support. The individual

contributions mattered, but so did the willingness behind them. I was asking people I knew to help something outside their immediate business, and they did.

That is one of the best uses of a network. It can become an exercise in collecting names and keeping track of who might be useful to you. It can also be a means of making it easier for people to contribute to something worthwhile. The second version feels much better, and tends to build stronger relationships in the process.

There was an early raffle that raised £880, with golf alongside Alex and the Shackleton's connection. That kind of result adds momentum. It gives the organising team evidence that people are engaged and prepared to support the cause. It also starts the enjoyable problem of working out how to make the main event live up to the interest already created.

Alan Tait and Andrew Murray helped provide entertainment for the corporate day. Their involvement added something beyond the usual sequence of golf, food and a prize list. The weather played its part too. When I reported the result in early May, the day had raised £13,000 for NeuroDropIn.

I was pleased, naturally. I was also clear that the credit belonged across the team: Captains, volunteers, staff, supporters, players and everyone who had helped make it happen. Charity events do not benefit from a single person trying to occupy the whole photograph. The success was collective, and the account of it should be too.

The £13,000 was the result of that day, rather than a final total for every fundraising activity in the year. Later, in February 2026, I wrote about Tommy and Mo's charity year having raised nearly £20,000. Those are different measures. Remembering the distinction matters when you tell the story afterwards. A good result does not require a larger number to make it respectable.

GolfFest25 was another test of what the club could bring people together to do. The planning had been present from the first blog. It combined golf with a wider day of food, music and activity. Simon and Lisa put considerable work into it. By July, the idea had become a real event, with all the practical demands that implies.

What I liked was the sense of opening the club out. Golf can be part of a community occasion without requiring every person present to care deeply about a handicap or a competition result. A club has space, facilities and people. Used thoughtfully, those can serve a wider audience while giving members another reason to enjoy their own place.

Events also expose the difference between a plan and a working plan. It is easy to agree that there should be food, music and a welcoming atmosphere. Someone then has to organise the supplier, the timing, the access, the staffing and the information.

Enthusiasm gets the project started. Detail allows people to enjoy the day.

The 2025 event went well and gave us experience to carry forward. It was not a reason to assume that the following year would run itself. Each edition would need planning,

and each would reveal something that could be improved. By the autumn we were already thinking about GolfFest26, with 25 July established as the date.

There was another memorable charity connection that summer. Naga Munchetty and James were involved in a visit and a round of golf, with Charlotte part of the occasion. The recognition surrounding Naga could attract attention, but the event still depended on relationships and good organisation. A familiar face is an opportunity, not a substitute for doing the work.

The local MP, Lizzi Collinge, also became part of the wider club conversation. I had visited Prime Minister's Questions earlier in the year, and later she visited the club with Bess from the Eagles. Biodiversity, local connections and the role of the course could be discussed in a setting that made them tangible.

Those conversations widened my understanding of what the club could represent. Golf was central, but the land, the environment and the relationships around it also mattered. A course is managed space with a history and a future. The people responsible for it have an opportunity to explain that value, rather than assume outsiders will understand it without being invited in.

Away from organised events, local life was doing its own work. Shackleton's celebrated an anniversary, hosted gatherings and became a familiar place for Sally Ann and me. Jamie's homemade barbecue was one of the pleasures recorded in the spring. Later there would be new owners, Debbie and Matt, and new connections through the club. Community is built through those ordinary repeated encounters as much as through a large formal occasion.

There were trips and sport elsewhere too: Norway, local rugby, Morecambe football, cricket and time with old friends. They gave the blogs variety, but they also reflected something important about the new working arrangement. I was beginning to make room for a life that was connected to the work without being consumed by a single job.

The charity days and GolfFest showed me Bare Up operating at its best. I could help connect people, contribute to the organisation and enjoy being part of something that produced a visible result. They also kept the scale of the work in perspective. A successful commercial project matters. So does a good day that raises money, makes somebody feel included or brings a community a little closer together.

I wanted room for both. The challenge was making sure that the club's underlying business could support all that ambition.

The business behind the view

There is a risk in a beautiful setting: the view can do so much of the talking that the business behind it receives less attention. Morecambe's outlook is a genuine advantage. It should help attract golfers, visitors and functions. It cannot, however, compensate indefinitely for unclear processes, weak communication or facilities that need investment.

During the spring and summer of 2025, my involvement moved further into those practical questions. Recruitment of a Club Manager became a major piece of work. There were good applicants, interviews and careful discussions about what the club needed. Choosing somebody for a role like that requires a wider view than whether their experience looks impressive on paper.

The person has to work with staff, members, directors, the Professional and outside contacts. They need to understand the finances and the service. They will inherit existing practices, some helpful and some less so, while being expected to improve things without unsettling everyone at once. That is a substantial brief.

I found the interviews encouraging. The calibre of candidates showed that the opportunity was attractive. It also reinforced the Board's responsibility to make a good decision and then create the conditions in which the appointee could succeed. Recruiting someone and leaving them to resolve every underlying issue alone would have been a poor version of support.

Leighton Williams was appointed, starting on 1 August 2025. His arrival was a significant point in the journey. There was now a manager who could take a range of work forward, with the appropriate responsibility and presence. That gave the club capacity and gave me a reason to reconsider where my own time was most useful.

Before and around that appointment, finance and planning occupied plenty of attention. Benchmarking with Kevin Fish offered a perspective beyond our own assumptions. We were looking at the year's performance, catering growth, costs and the relationship between immediate decisions and a three-year plan. The aim was to make choices on a clearer basis.

I have worked with budgets and forecasts through much of my career. A budget sets an expectation. A forecast should respond to what is happening. Confusing the two can make a business cling to a picture that no longer reflects reality. Equally, changing the forecast every time somebody becomes nervous does not provide much discipline.

The weather gave me an everyday illustration in June. A forecast can sound authoritative and still differ from the day you experience. The business equivalent is not a reason to abandon forecasting. It is a reason to use judgement, question assumptions and update your understanding as evidence arrives.

Known customers provide another example. A business may think it knows what people want because it has served them for years. Sometimes that is true. Sometimes the business is repeating an old belief that nobody has tested recently. Asking properly may reveal a change in behaviour, a frustration or a possibility that the existing figures do not explain.

At the club, the course was the greatest asset, and it needed care. Irrigation appeared in the autumn discussion as a system under strain. The condition of a course depends on decisions that can be expensive, largely unseen and difficult to postpone indefinitely. There is a responsibility to the next period of membership as well as the current one.

By the end of 2025, early work on the course was another reminder that avoiding investment can be the more costly choice. We cannot afford to do it is sometimes a fair conclusion. We cannot afford not to do it may also be fair. The difference should come from evidence about the asset, the risk and the club's capacity, rather than whichever phrase sounds more convincing at a meeting.

The clubhouse offered another set of possibilities. Richard's three-dimensional survey helped us look at the space with fresh eyes. An unexpected room prompted the Narnia comparison in the blog. That discovery was amusing, but it also pointed to a practical truth: you can become so accustomed to a building that you stop noticing what might be done with it.

The longer-term ambition was a clubhouse that contributed more strongly to income and use. That did not mean treating every room as an isolated project. Visitors, functions, members, hospitality and the shop all formed part of the experience. A change in one area could have implications for another. The plan needed to recognise those connections.

The same applied outside. Council discussions about access and parking brought the club into a wider local context. The R&A's work on sustainability and biodiversity offered another perspective. Scott and the greenkeeping team understood the course in a way that a commercial discussion alone could not. Listening across those areas improved the quality of the questions we asked.

The 59Club assessment was useful too. A secret-shopper perspective offered evidence of what an unfamiliar visitor experienced. The course was a strength; other parts of the journey needed to catch up. That is not a comfortable finding to ignore. It is exactly the sort of information a club needs if it wants to improve.

I had thought about sponsorship early on, particularly the need to look after existing supporters. Finding a sponsor and retaining one are related but different tasks. People want to know what their support is doing, what value they receive and whether the relationship will be remembered once payment has arrived. Gratitude is part of that. Delivery is the rest.

All of this made for a busy period. By August, I wrote about enjoying a week with fewer meetings. That was not a sudden rejection of planning. It was a reminder that meetings are a means of progressing work, and the amount of time spent in them is not a reliable measure of progress itself.

Leighton's arrival created an opportunity to hand over appropriately. I could continue to contribute without making myself central to every decision. That required confidence in other people and a willingness to let the role change. Helping an organisation build capacity should eventually reduce its dependence on you.

By September, the question of my next chapter was becoming more explicit. The club's work would continue, but it was no longer the only place where I could make a substantial contribution. A visit to an exhibition in Grasmere helped point me towards an unexpected answer.

Back to The PGA



Finding the people and stories behind golf's history.

In September 2025 I visited the Bonington exhibition in Grasmere. David Brett, the curator, helped bring the material to life. What stayed with me was the relationship between an object and its story. A thing on display can be interesting in its own right, but the person, the event and the circumstances behind it give it another dimension.

That was good timing. In October I returned to The PGA as Heritage Officer. This time I would be based at The Belfry rather than Kings Lodge at Gleneagles. Familiar faces provided a warm welcome, and there were new people to meet. I had left my earlier PGA role on good terms. Returning confirmed the value of those enduring relationships.

The work was new to me in important respects. Knowing golf and knowing an organisation do not make you a trained historian or conservator. I needed to understand the collection, learn from knowledgeable people and identify where my experience could be useful. There was a challenge in that, and I found it energising.

The initial focus was The PGA and Ryder Cup collections. That gave the role boundaries from the outset. Without priorities, a heritage collection could easily lead you down an endless series of fascinating paths. I would later refer to the temptation to chase rabbits. Golf history has plenty of rabbits, and some are exceptionally persuasive.

Auditing was an early requirement. Before deciding what could be displayed, loaned or shared digitally, we needed a clearer understanding of what existed. There were clubs, bags, trophies, photographs, documents, scorecards and other material. Some objects announced their importance immediately. Others required research before their significance became apparent.

By February 2026, more than 500 assets had been audited. That number represented work, but the real benefit was the ability to ask better questions about the collection. What do we have? What do we know about it? What remains uncertain? How might someone encounter it meaningfully? A count without that wider purpose would have been a limited achievement.

Regional work took the audit beyond The Belfry. Scotland and Ireland were part of the process, with David Longmuir and the Gleneagles connections among those involved. The material was not all conveniently gathered in one place. Relationships and coordination mattered as much as the spreadsheet.

Some discoveries were immediately memorable. Seve's bag and Vardon's clubs connected the work to names any golfer would recognise. Henry Cotton material, including a telegram associated with Carnoustie in 1937, offered another route into a story. A 1955 speech by Lord Brabazon, recorded in banquet notes, showed how an unassuming document could hold a particular voice and moment.

There was also an autograph from Edward VIII. The interest lay in the item and its context, rather than an opportunity to make a sweeping historical claim. Heritage work encourages precision. A familiar name can tempt you to repeat what you think you know. The evidence deserves more care than that.

The Royal photographs provided a particularly satisfying connection. John Mulgrew's daughter, Adele, had not seen some of the photographs involving her father. Helping somebody encounter a part of family history gives the work an immediate purpose. The archive is no longer an abstract store of interesting things. It has reached a person for whom the material means something specific.

In January 2026, an enquiry from the great-niece of four Cottrell brothers led to a more sobering piece of research. All had been PGA Professionals; three were killed in action during the First World War. Historic records and earlier research helped bring the story together. I completed the work and shared what I had found.

I wrote that it was a story worthy of a film. That was a response to the scale of the family's experience, rather than a proposal to turn their lives into entertainment. The research reminded me that golf history is part of wider history. A Professional's career can lead into family life, military service, migration and circumstances far removed from the course.

It also changed the pace of the work. A commercial question often needs a prompt answer and an action. A family enquiry may require patient searching and the acceptance that some information will remain missing. You cannot manufacture a satisfying ending simply because you would like to provide one.

More requests followed. Clubs approaching anniversaries wanted help with their histories. James Arundel at Delamere Forest was one such connection. Other enquiries involved older trophies, Professionals who had worked overseas and families trying to understand a fragment of information. Each required an assessment of what could be established and where further help might lie.

I enjoyed the point at which different pieces began to connect. A photograph might explain a name on a document. A family member might recognise a person who had been unidentified. A club record might place a Professional somewhere at a particular time. The work demanded curiosity, but also restraint. A plausible link still needed evidence.

The PGA's 125th anniversary in 2026 added a public dimension. There were images to select, recent history to record and opportunities to communicate what the organisation had done. It would have been easy to stay with the most recognisable old material. Recent developments mattered too. Recording initiatives such as PGA Play meant thinking about today's work as tomorrow's heritage.

Digital access was another part of the opportunity. Categorising and sharing material could allow people to encounter it without being in the room where it was stored. That did not eliminate the need to care for the physical collection. It gave the collection another route to an audience.

The appeal for me was becoming clearer. I could combine golf knowledge, relationships, research and communication. The work allowed me to help an organisation, but also individuals whose connection might be intensely personal. It could produce something useful from a question that initially looked very small.

There were still practical limits. I worked part time, and interest could expand more quickly than the hours available. Enthusiasm was valuable; it was not an additional day in the calendar. I needed to choose priorities and keep learning where the role could make the strongest contribution.

For the moment, I was delighted to be back. Bare Up had acquired a substantial new strand, and my working week had become rather less predictable in the best possible way.

A sign of progress

If I ever need reminding that a sound idea and an approved proposal are different from a delivered project, I can look back at the Morecambe sponsorship initiative. It offered a sensible opportunity: make better use of the club's assets, provide value to supporters and generate income for improvements. It also took rather longer to launch than I expected.

The idea developed during 2025. We looked beyond a single sign or a one-off event towards a more complete offer, including holes, rooms, the Halfway House and other opportunities. A sponsor should understand what they are supporting and what they receive. The club should understand what it has promised and who will make sure that promise is kept.

I had written earlier about the difference between finding and retaining a sponsor. The latter requires continuing attention. An agreement is the beginning of the relationship. It gives both parties expectations, and the club has to deliver against them. A thank-you matters, but it will not compensate for an arrangement that nobody manages.

In November, the Board approved a proposal with substantial potential over a three-year period. That was progress. It was also the point at which the work had to move from a paper proposal into designs, costs, positioning and a process people could understand. There was no shortage of reasonable questions. Unfortunately, reasonable questions do not answer themselves.

Supplier discussions and delays followed. At various points I believed the launch was close, and then it was not. Anyone reading the weekly blogs could follow the sequence of optimism and revised expectations. It would be convenient to compress it into a smooth paragraph in a memoir. The untidy version is more truthful, and probably more useful to anyone who has tried to deliver a similar project.

January brought a productive meeting with Acorn Golf, specialists in course signage. Their expertise made a difference. They understood what was needed and could guide us through the process. Clear designs and costings helped turn a general ambition into something concrete.

Even then, timing continued to slip. Signage and pin-placement questions needed resolving. Simon, Scott, Leighton and the Board brought different perspectives, and those perspectives were relevant. A sign has to work commercially, visually and practically. It sits on a course managed by people who understand its use. The best answer had to take more than my preferred launch date into account.

Working with experts is helpful partly because it exposes the limits of your own assumptions. I could understand the commercial proposition and help communicate it. I did not need to decide every technical detail. Acorn and the people responsible for the course were better placed on parts of that work.

The initiative finally launched in February 2026. The figure I described around the launch was an income target of approximately £20,000 a year, rather than money already received. Earlier discussions had used other measures over a three-year period. Those distinctions are easily lost when enthusiasm takes over. Potential, target, agreement and receipt are separate stages.

Members received the first opportunity to express interest. That made sense: they knew the club, often had businesses of their own and might value a visible connection with a place they cared about. Initial interest was encouraging. It was not a reason to announce that every opportunity had been sold.

The wider lesson was about progress rather than signage. There can be several explanations for a delay, and frustration tends to simplify them into one: why has this not happened yet? That question is understandable. It becomes more useful when followed by what is still required, who needs to do it and what decision will allow the next step.

Hospitality recruitment ran alongside the sponsorship work. We were looking for someone with knowledge, experience and energy, capable of seeing opportunities and making them happen. The interviews brought talented candidates. As with the Club Manager appointment, fit mattered. The role needed to work within the club's real circumstances, with the people and responsibilities already there.

That combination of commercial offer and staffing capacity was important. There is little point creating more demand if the organisation cannot provide a good service when it arrives. Sponsorship, functions, food and member experience were connected. The work had to recognise the people expected to carry the promises into practice.

The winter blogs mixed these issues with more ordinary subjects. New running shoes appeared to improve my five-kilometre time, which I chose to regard as evidence that the old shoes had been holding me back. Dry January made an appearance. So did coffee equipment, service experiences and an expensive Audi lighting problem. It was not a perfectly focused diary of executive achievement.

Those everyday experiences had a business connection, though. A coffee supplier that explains what has happened and resolves a problem leaves a different impression from a company whose process sends you round in circles. A costly replacement can make a customer question the design of a product. Service is experienced at the moment something happens, rather than in the statement a company publishes about its values.

The sponsorship work was happening within a broader year of change. Outgoing Board colleagues, including Gordon and John, had made their contributions. New candidates and fresh perspectives were coming into view ahead of the AGM. It was a reminder that a club's progress depends on continuity as well as new energy.

My mother turned ninety in February, another occasion that made the timetable of a signage project look less momentous. Family stories and a good celebration have a way of adjusting your sense of proportion. The task still needed finishing, but it did not need to occupy every corner of life.

By March, the first public year of Bare Up was complete. I looked back on a working arrangement that was flexible, varied and increasingly centred on people and projects I enjoyed. The business was not designed to make me a millionaire. It was intended to let me contribute usefully and have a worthwhile working life.

The sponsorship launch was one result within that year. It had tested patience, collaboration and the discipline of describing progress accurately. Another development was about to test something rather different: whether I could put my experience to use while learning a till and unpacking deliveries.

I was going to work in the Pro Shop.

Across the counter



Small conversations are part of the service.

In March 2026 I was offered work in the Morecambe Pro Shop. After years with sporting-goods businesses, golf brands, The PGA, Scottish Golf and a club Board, I was about to learn something from a rather different position. I would be working where the customer actually encountered the product, the system and the person serving them.

The first proper shift lasted three hours. That was enough.

Unpacking garments, labelling them, arranging stock and serving customers at the same time quickly revealed things that a conversation about retail performance would not. Barcode labels were inconsistent and sometimes lacked important information. Tissue paper created waste and extra handling without doing anything useful for the person buying the garment. I found myself thinking about redesigned labels after that single shift.

The amusement was not lost on me. I had spent years in what I described as the ivory towers of sales, marketing and operations. Now a small piece of paper could hold up a transaction. Suppliers and brands should spend time at that end of the process. A decision that looks efficient from a desk can become a repeated irritation in a shop.

It was not all criticism of other people's systems. I had to learn the till and the shop's way of doing things. Experience does not protect you from being the person who needs something explained again. There is a useful humility in being new at a task while old enough to have opinions about nearly everything around it.

The response on LinkedIn to the shop work was much stronger than I expected. Perhaps people liked the change of perspective. Perhaps they recognised the value of doing the work rather than discussing it at a distance. Either way, it gave me an opportunity to make a point that would remain important: there is no sensible status boundary around learning something useful.

Simon's knowledge and the team's daily experience mattered. I could bring commercial ideas and ask questions, but I needed to understand what already worked. The shop was not an empty space waiting for a former marketing director to discover retail. People had been serving members, fitting equipment, advising customers and handling the practical demands long before my first shift.

Advice was one of its strongest advantages. A golfer can buy many things online. That does not mean they receive the same help choosing the right item, understanding a fit or deciding whether a purchase will solve the problem they think they have. The shop's expertise deserved a clearer place in the story told to members and visitors.

I could test my own susceptibility to equipment promises quite easily. A new wedge, a putter or a pair of shoes always has the attraction of being something you can change immediately. Altering the swing or accepting that the golfer is the problem tends to require more effort. My eventual admission that the putter's difficulties might actually belong to me was not a major scientific breakthrough, but it was progress.

The cost of a pair of golf shoes also appeared in the blogs. An initial price can look high until you think about how often the shoes are used. Cost per use is not the answer to every buying decision, but it is a more useful question than price alone. A knowledgeable person in a shop can help a customer make that assessment without simply directing them to the most expensive option.

Read The Green, the weekly Thursday communication, began in April. It gave us another way to tell people what was happening and draw attention to opportunities. Communication needed to reach members in a form they would actually use. The information could be accurate and still achieve very little if nobody noticed it.

I also began looking more closely at the visitor journey, from booking to the tee. A visitor's experience crosses several areas of a club. They may not care which department is responsible for a particular step. They simply know whether it was clear, welcoming and easy. Small improvements across that journey can be more valuable than a large promise at the beginning followed by confusion in the middle.

Shop shifts created plenty of those observations. Footfall, conversion, stock presentation, drinks and small purchases all became more tangible. A person buying coffee or a Mars bar is still a customer, and the interaction may shape their impression of the club. Not every transaction needs a strategic discussion. Every customer deserves sensible service.

Then there were the conversations that were not really transactions at all. In May I wrote about how much the club meant to some members, particularly older people or those not in the best physical or mental health. For them it could be a sanctuary: somewhere familiar, with friends and a sense of belonging.

That realisation deepened my understanding of the work. A shop colleague may hear a story, notice someone has been absent or simply provide a few minutes of company. Listening can be the useful thing being offered. It may not produce a line in the sales report, but it contributes to the reason people want to be at the club.

I did not need to tell private stories from those conversations to make the point. Their significance lay in what they taught me about the place. A commercial plan should recognise that value. If improvements leave some of the people most attached to the club feeling that they no longer belong, something important has been missed.

This did not remove the need for change. Facilities, systems, income and service all required attention. It changed the way I thought about explaining and delivering that change. Progress should make the club stronger while keeping people connected to it. That takes more care than assuming everyone will immediately understand the intended benefit.

Later, name badges provided a small practical example. I had worn one at a Chamber event and found it useful, so the idea came into the shop. Leighton arranged them for the wider team. Members might know the staff already; a visitor might not. Making introductions easier is a modest improvement, but modest improvements can be repeated many times in a week.

Seasonal stock, sale rails, layout, blinds and air-conditioning discussions followed as the summer moved on. Those were everyday retail questions, informed by experience at the counter. Looking with fresh eyes helped, provided I remembered that the changes had to work for the people using the space.

The Pro Shop became one of the most rewarding additions to Bare Up. It gave me a direct connection with members and customers, and it challenged assumptions I might otherwise have carried on repeating. It also supplied evidence for the commercial work: actual conversations and actual processes, rather than a view from several steps away.

Three hours had been enough to start that learning. Several months later, it was still continuing.

Small things that matter

In May 2026, Morecambe celebrated what would have been Eric Morecambe's hundredth birthday. For Sally Ann, the occasion had a personal connection. Her family had lived across the street from Eric's mother, Sadie. Sally Ann's mum, Pauline, helped Sadie with errands, shopping and meals. Eric appreciated the kindness and sometimes called in to thank her.

Sally Ann remembered making him tea and feeling embarrassed about the family's unattractive brown teapot. It is a wonderfully human detail. The famous visitor and the ordinary household object occupy the same memory, with the teapot apparently causing more concern at the time than the celebrity.

We went to the Eric and Ern Show at the Winter Gardens. Sally Ann met Eric's son, Gary, and daughter, Gail, and told them about Pauline and Sadie. They loved hearing it, and we had a photograph together. Pauline would have loved that moment too.

I wrote that kindness is rarely forgotten. The story gave that thought a particular shape. An everyday act had remained in family memory and then travelled back to another part of the family many years later. Nobody involved could have arranged that outcome when the errands and meals were happening.

It belonged in the Bare Pit because it belonged in our life. It also echoed what I was discovering through heritage work and the shop. The significance of an encounter may be much greater than it appears to the person providing the help. A few minutes, a useful answer or a remembered name can matter.

The Captains' Charity Day that same month supported Stanley's Community Centre. Mike Benson and Colleen Speight were the Captains, and the day raised almost £10,000. The weather was good, the atmosphere was strong and the work behind it had been considerable. Again, it was a result achieved by many people, with the cause at its centre.

I helped bring opportunities and prizes into the picture, including a chance connected with The Bay. Later, Julie and her dad, Geoff, were among the raffle winners whose opportunity was moving towards a walk-on appearance in a future episode. That was something to look forward to, rather than an event already completed by the end of this book. Fundraising creates an obligation to help the promised prize become real.

The charity year had changed, but the underlying reason for the work had not. Golf could bring people together and generate support for something local and worthwhile.

The day was enjoyable in its own right. Its value did not depend on everyone playing particularly well, which was reassuring for those of us whose contribution to the atmosphere could exceed our contribution to the scoring.

My own athletic progress had encountered bruised ribs after a fall. Coughing, sneezing and laughing were suddenly unhelpful activities. A busy week is considerably less appealing when ordinary movement keeps reminding you of an accident. I was recovering, but not with the speed my diary might have preferred.

There were pleasant distractions. A birthday golf day for Adam at Penrith brought good company, fine conditions and the discovery that egg and hash-brown butties deserved urgent consideration at Morecambe. Visiting another club can be a serious learning opportunity. It can also produce a very specific catering recommendation.

Billy Foster's appearance at a Sportsman's Dinner was another highlight. Simon took a chance on the event, and it paid off. Billy's accounts of working around players such as Seve held the room. A story about Darren Clarke on the first tee at the K Club in 2006 brought back my own memories of being there. Lester Crabtree added to the evening's entertainment.

The Ryder Cup had been part of my working and personal life in several ways. I had been at the K Club, Celtic Manor and Gleneagles, and a guest at Valhalla. Watching a later edition from home could bring those experiences back. Golf's history did not always feel remote; sometimes it was becoming history while I could still remember where I had stood.

That was useful perspective for the PGA work. An artefact may acquire a formal description, but it began in somebody's lived experience. The original brass team-room door signs from The Belfry, donated back into the collection, carried that kind of connection. Their value involved the event and the people who had encountered them, as well as the objects themselves.

Recognition mattered too. Helping expedite a fifty-year PGA plaque so a family could celebrate together was a satisfying piece of practical work. An administrative task can carry emotional importance for the person waiting for it. The organisation may handle many such cases; the family is experiencing its own occasion once.

Elsewhere, a message from China reconnected me with someone from around 2010. Other old colleagues continued to find new roles and new directions. The SpinMe chapter had ended, but the people from it were still part of life. In one remote Christmas gathering, connections stretched across Texas and France. A business ending does not erase the relationships formed within it.

Family celebrations gave the season its own rhythm. Sally Ann's birthday, my birthday and our wedding anniversary arrived within a familiar fortnight. In June 2026 we marked thirty-two years of marriage. There were visits to Arnside, wine at Crossfield's

and time at Shackleton's. I made the necessary distinction between the Arnside bore and myself. Sally Ann is entitled to her own assessment of that distinction.

My mother's ninetieth birthday and Linda's sixtieth later in the year added larger milestones. Glasgow visits, meals and family stories provided another reminder that time does not become valuable only when it is recorded as productive. A short visit can be a good use of a day, even if nothing has been added to a project plan.

Music and familiar friendships appeared throughout. The Dublin Cup friends went back to college in 1983. We had not played the golf part of the gathering since 2004, when I was the last winner, but the connection remained. The title had survived rather better than any evidence of my current ability to defend it.

These were not diversions from the Bare Up journey. They were part of the reason the journey mattered. A different working arrangement should provide room for relationships, enjoyment and occasions that will not come round again. If it produces only another version of being permanently unavailable, it has missed something.

By early summer, I was working in the shop, researching heritage, contributing at the club and preparing for a trip that had been in the diary since the previous December. Scotland were going to the World Cup. So was I.

Scotland and the wider world



A little bit of Scotland, a long way from home.

The World Cup trip began to become real in December 2025. Boston was in the plan, and flights and a hotel were booked. The match ticket was another matter. I had committed myself to the journey before every piece of it was secure, which is perhaps a recognisably Scottish way to approach a major football tournament.

Scotland's qualification had already brought plenty of emotion. There were memories of France in 1998 and the long wait since then. For a supporter, the opportunity was about more than the likely result. It was a chance to be there, to share the occasion and to add an experience that would remain enjoyable even when the football became less cooperative.

The application for tickets was unsuccessful at one stage. The flights and hotel remained booked. By April I had bought a ticket for the Haiti match, at a price I described as somewhere between an investment and a minor financial event. The countdown was then sixty-nine days. It had moved from an optimistic idea to something I was actually going to do.

There were concerns beforehand. Travel, entry to the United States, costs and the practical arrangements all gave me things to consider. I wrote about a quoted increase

in the train fare to the stadium. Major sporting events can make the supporter feel that enthusiasm is being examined very closely by the people setting prices.

Preparations also supplied an incentive to look after myself. In the spring I wrote about losing weight and improving fitness ahead of Boston. There were shakes, soups, salmon and, occasionally, whisky. It was an effort to arrive in better shape, rather than an application to become a professional athlete. The new running shoes had already received more credit than was probably reasonable.

Once there, the worries gave way to the experience. In the blog after my return, I described straightforward travel, a welcoming arrival and a city that seemed pleased to have the Scots. Even the police appeared good-humoured about the influx. The atmosphere was a large international gathering, with a substantial proportion of the participants wearing kilts.

The heat was less well matched to my personal preferences. I enjoy the idea of sunshine more consistently than I enjoy temperatures approaching thirty degrees. Morecambe Bay's cooler air would regain considerable appeal when I got home. In Boston, however, the atmosphere made the discomfort a smaller part of the story.

I had seen Scotland at the World Cup. That was the important fact. The match and the company gave me a memory that no amount of later disappointment could completely undo. It was worth making the trip rather than postponing the opportunity until some future occasion when everything might be cheaper, easier or more certain.

The blogs paused for the trip. I did not produce the normal Sunday update while away. That small absence was appropriate. Sometimes the useful thing is to be present where you are, rather than trying to turn every experience immediately into a public account.

Back home, I became an armchair critic for BBC 5 Live, offering a Scotland supporter's perspective. I recorded an initial contribution and then a second. It was enjoyable, and there was a pleasing connection with the school-leaver who had wanted to be a sports journalist. I did not expect it to replace the day job, particularly as the day job itself had become difficult to define.

Scotland's exit brought the familiar adjustment of expectations. I temporarily adopted other footballing allegiances, with limited success. The television eventually needed a rest, and The Archers offered an entirely different sort of ongoing drama. My wounded national pride could not be allowed to organise the whole household indefinitely.

Sally Ann showed patience. She is English, I live in England and many of my friends are English. The football banter is part of the enjoyment, provided everyone is able to give it and receive it. I can be ridiculous about Scotland without believing that the people around me should accommodate every ridiculous remark without reply.

When England came close, I could understand the disappointment as well as enjoy the teasing. That is the useful part of remembering the people involved. The national shorthand makes the joke work. The friendships keep it in proportion.

Boston was not the only trip or event in this period. Norway had provided fjords, Constitution Day and a memorable excursion around Pulpit Rock in May 2025. Old friends gathered in Edinburgh and around Cardrona. Glasgow remained important through family and former colleagues. Each trip made a slightly different connection between the earlier career and the life now taking shape.

In August 2026, Sparks in York was a bucket-list occasion, with Ron and Russell still performing at ages when many people have long since decided to do less. Their energy was rather encouraging for someone supposedly moving towards semi-retirement. September brought a front-row evening with *The Rest Is Politics* at the Royal Festival Hall, with Rory Stewart, Alastair Campbell, Katty Kay and Anthony Scaramucci.

Those events reflected an interest in people who can hold an audience and make ideas engaging. Billy Foster had done it with golf stories. The Bonington exhibition had done it through objects and context. Political discussion and music did it in other ways. I was increasingly interested in how attention becomes connection.

At home, a walk along the Bay could be just as welcome as a trip. By October, Sally Ann and I were enjoying the canal and shore, an eight-mile route, coffee at the Royal and birds along the way. She was rather better placed than I was to identify them. The unfamiliar names gave me another opportunity to learn something without requiring a new business project.

The point of all this was not to demonstrate how busy the leisure diary had become. It was to remember why flexibility mattered. Bare Up had given me responsibilities I valued, but it also allowed different experiences to sit beside them. Boston was one substantial example of taking that opportunity.

When I returned, there was plenty waiting. The shop review was under way, the club had decisions to make and the PGA enquiries continued. I brought back good memories, some footballing disappointment and a renewed appreciation of home. That felt like a reasonable return on a trip that had begun with a ticket problem and an alarming bill.

Asking and listening

In late June 2026 we began a more detailed review of the Pro Shop. Simon had built a shop I thought very highly of. The range, presentation and service were strong. The review was therefore about understanding a good operation and finding where it could become better, rather than treating the existence of questions as evidence of failure.

That willingness to ask was important. People sometimes avoid feedback because they fear it will undermine the work already done. It can do the opposite. Customers may value something more strongly than you realised. They may also identify a frustration that has been easy to overlook. Both kinds of information help you make decisions.

We used XPOS sales data alongside a members' survey. The numbers and the comments could inform one another. A sales report might show what was bought. It would not necessarily explain what a person had considered, what they could not find or why they chose to buy elsewhere. The survey could provide part of that missing context.

The early picture suggested strong shop traffic but scope to improve conversion into higher-value purchases. Coffee, cold drinks and Mars bars were doing their part. That was useful information, and it raised practical questions. Were members aware of the range and advice available? Were offers reaching them? Did the presentation help them notice something relevant?

By July, the survey had closed with 117 completed responses, approximately twenty per cent of the playing membership. I would have liked more. I wrote, with some frustration, about people who readily offered opinions in the bar but were less inclined to complete a survey when invited. There was a fair point beneath that reaction, but the useful thing was to work with the evidence we had.

One hundred and seventeen responses represented time people had chosen to give us. It was enough to identify themes and opportunities. It was not a reason to assume that every non-respondent held the same views. Good analysis should acknowledge what the information tells you and what it cannot.

The action plan mattered more than the presentation of the results. A report full of graphs could look impressive and leave the customer experience exactly as it had been. The purpose was to make recommendations and carry out visible improvements. Members needed to see that responding had been worthwhile.

A year-round promotional calendar was taking shape, alongside better signage and communication. Members had also expressed preferences about how offers should

reach them. Those were practical findings. They could inform the work without requiring a lengthy argument about which channel somebody personally preferred.

I liked the phrase you asked, we delivered. It describes a relationship people can recognise. The club has listened, acted where appropriate and explained the response. That does not mean every request will be agreed. Some may be impractical, unaffordable or inconsistent with another need. An honest explanation is still a response.

Communication was becoming a wider theme. New menus, recruitment, visitor arrangements, tee times and shop developments were all happening. People could misunderstand a good idea if they had not heard the thinking behind it. In the absence of information, assumptions fill the gap. The club needed to make the relevant information easy to find and clear enough to be useful.

I was optimistic after Board and Finance meetings during that summer. There was energy, constructive challenge and a willingness to look for solutions. That did not mean every decision was right or every project moved quickly. It meant there was a better basis for dealing with the work still to do.

Then I gave myself a lesson in the very behaviour I was encouraging in others.

In July, frustrated by an experience, I published a rant. I later described it as unacceptable, a cheap shot and against the way I normally tried to work. The details of the original complaint are less important here than the choice I made about expressing it. I knew the people involved were working hard to improve things. I should have spoken to them directly.

Having a reason to be disappointed did not make the public reaction fair. If I had been on the receiving end, I would not have welcomed it. I apologised and gave an assurance that it would not happen again. The team dealt with it through a quiet word and an honest conversation, then moved on. I respected that greatly.

This belongs in the book because it belongs in the journey. It would be easy to include only the parts in which I asked good questions and promoted constructive discussion. That would leave out the occasion when I failed to apply my own standard. A memoir about useful experience should have room for experience that was uncomfortable.

The episode also sharpened a boundary I had been considering since June. My role at the club was to support, encourage and challenge where appropriate. It was not to behave as if every project were my personal responsibility or every delay a reflection on the people doing the work. Capable staff had responsibilities of their own.

There is a difference between caring about the outcome and controlling the process. I could offer a nudge, or occasionally cajole, without trying to occupy every role. The practical question was whether my involvement made the next step easier. If it added pressure without clarity, I needed to reconsider it.

Volunteering raised the same issue. Stone-picking early, before it interfered with the team's other work, was a useful contribution. Arriving with a personal agenda while staff were busy might not be. Support should fit the actual need, rather than the volunteer's preferred image of being helpful.

The summer also brought GolfFest26. After a long run of dry weather, rain arrived for the day. There was still golf, food, music and company. My own result was not the standard against which the event's value should be assessed. Simon's efforts and the wider team's work deserved recognition regardless of what appeared on my scorecard.

I began submitting cards for an official handicap too. The first round produced an eighty, a near hole-in-one and a small team win. By August I had a handicap of 8.8. None of that prevented further encounters with the white jacket. A figure can be accurate without predicting how I will play on a particular Thursday.

There was a certain appropriateness in that. The review, the survey and the golf all required me to deal with evidence rather than the picture I preferred. The apology required me to do the same with my own behaviour. None of those tasks was completed by simply declaring a good intention.

By the end of the summer, asking and listening felt less like a consultancy method and more like a discipline I needed to keep practising. The club would benefit from it. So would I.

History deserves an audience

By the spring of 2026, I had begun to think more clearly about what The PGA's heritage collection could do. The audit and research were necessary foundations. The next opportunity was to bring material into settings where people could see it, understand it and make a connection of their own.

That required more than taking an object out of a cupboard. Loans involved process, responsibility and insurance. A valuable artefact needs to be cared for, and the organisation lending it needs to know what will happen to it. Wider access and proper protection belong together. Neither is helped by treating the other as an inconvenience.

In May I agreed my first artefact loan on behalf of The PGA, to Verulam Golf Club, to support its association with Samuel Ryder and the Ryder Cup. It was a satisfying step from identifying an opportunity to making something happen. The setting gave the history a natural audience and a reason for being there.

Southport & Ainsdale provided another strong connection. Paul's knowledge and the club's history helped shape discussions about the Ryder Cups played there in 1933 and 1937. In July, arrangements for the loan of the 1933 Silver Salver meant it could go on public display from Open week through to the end of the year.

There was something particularly appropriate about that. The artefact was returning to a place connected with the event it represented. Members and visitors could encounter the history in its own setting. An object that might otherwise remain out of sight had become a reason for a conversation.

I had earlier advised that a 1934 trophy associated with Royal Blackheath should find its proper home there. That was another expression of the same thinking. The best outcome is not always to keep everything within one collection. The right place may be the place where the object has the clearest meaning and can be appreciated appropriately.

An enquiry involving an award and decanter connected with a journalist who had died led to a similar reflection in the summer. The family connection mattered. Heritage work should not become an automatic exercise in acquiring anything old. Sometimes the most valuable home for an item is with the people for whom it preserves a personal memory.

Those decisions require judgement. Institutional history and family history overlap, but they are not interchangeable. A collection can explain a public career. A family may

carry the private meaning of an object. Good advice should recognise both rather than assume that formal display is always the superior outcome.

At PING House in the summer, prospective PGA Professionals and their families encountered the Ryder Cup at an Open Day. I had been fortunate to hold the trophy several times. It still did not feel ordinary. A new occasion, a new group of people and another winning team engraved on it gave the experience a different character.

The parents were often especially excited. They wanted photographs and enjoyed the proximity to something they knew from television and the history of the game. Their sons were considering a professional future. For a moment, the trophy connected that future with a visible tradition. It was easy to imagine what the encounter might mean if one of them eventually held it as a player.

That is one reason familiarity should not turn into indifference. Working around significant objects can make them part of the normal environment. The person seeing them for the first time has a different experience. A good custodian remembers that difference.

The research continued alongside the public work. A lady in New Zealand asked about her Scottish father, who had worked as a Professional from the 1930s onwards. She supplied parts of the story, and I tried to fill gaps. By late September, I had not found as much as I wanted. The search remained open.

William Seabrook, described as a golf teacher around 1916, had presented another puzzle earlier in the year. There were blanks rather than a satisfying breakthrough. Other enquiries involved James Braid, JH Taylor and a possible 1966 connection, or a Jack Nicklaus letter and Lord Derby. Interesting questions did not necessarily produce immediate answers.

That uncertainty belongs in the account. Heritage research is not a sequence in which every clue reliably leads to the revelation required for a chapter ending. Sometimes the evidence is missing. Sometimes a promising trail fades. The responsibility is to explain what has been found and leave room for further work.

Media offered another route to an audience. In September I met The PGA's media team to discuss using more heritage material in communications. Trophies, medals, photographs and documents could support stories relevant to current members and the wider golfing world. The challenge was choosing what to share first, rather than finding something worth sharing at all.

I began identifying items and possibilities. The work connected with skills from earlier roles: understanding an audience, finding the important point and communicating it clearly. The material was historical, but the task was contemporary. We were asking how people might engage with it now.

A planned medal presentation at Wentworth exposed a more difficult part of that relationship between past and present. During August and early September, I worked on arrangements involving leading golfers, schedules and organisations. What seemed as though it should be straightforward became demanding and uncertain. In the end, I cancelled my planned trip to the BMW PGA Championship.

I was disappointed. There had been effort invested, and I believed the occasion mattered. A thoughtful conversation with the wife of one of the golfers also helped me consider the pressures surrounding major events. I kept her identity private, as it should remain here.

The wider question was how to preserve worthwhile traditions while recognising current demands. A short presentation, handshake and photograph can mean a great deal to an organisation, its members and the volunteers involved. Equally, the fact that a tradition exists does not entitle us to ignore everybody else's circumstances.

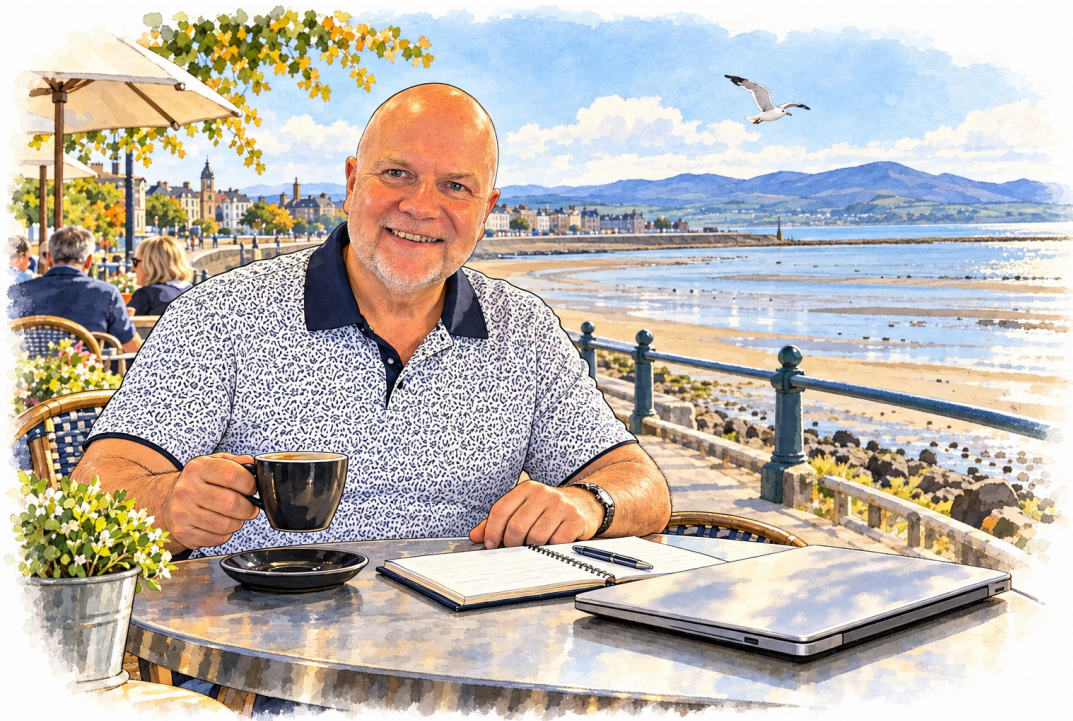
I concluded that the process needed a substantial rethink. There were lessons for everyone, including me. Repeating the same difficult arrangement and expecting enthusiasm to solve it would not be a good use of time. The purpose should guide a better format, rather than the format being protected regardless of whether it still worked.

By October, the role was moving towards a clearer balance of research, access and storytelling. A meeting with my predecessor, David Wright, at Birmingham International was both enjoyable and useful. His knowledge of golf is extraordinary. A couple of hours discussing projects and historical puzzles could help establish whether I was approaching a question sensibly.

It was another reminder that Bare Up did not require me to operate alone. Expertise, advice and reassurance were available through the relationships around the work. Asking was part of doing the job properly.

The collection's future mattered as much as its condition. I wanted more people to encounter it, with enough context to appreciate what they were seeing. That ambition was still developing as this book closed. It gave the PGA strand of Bare Up a purpose that reached beyond the immediate task list.

A busy kind of semi retirement



Room to reflect, with plenty still to do.

By October 2026, I was supposed to be edging towards something resembling semi-retirement. The diary did not appear to have received the message. There was work in the shop, work for The PGA, club projects, meetings, research and the usual collection of ideas that seemed perfectly manageable until I considered them together.

The important difference was that I enjoyed much of it. That made the workload easier to accept, but also easier to underestimate. An interesting enquiry can absorb an evening without announcing itself as work. A useful meeting can generate another three tasks. Part-time hours remain part-time hours, even when the subject matter is absorbing.

At The PGA I regularly found myself working beyond the official allocation. There was so much to do, and I enjoyed the challenge. I recognised the opportunity to make history relevant to today's golfers and future generations. I also recognised the need to be realistic about capacity. A role cannot be built sustainably on the assumption that enthusiasm will supply unlimited extra time.

Morecambe was presenting a similar lesson. In October I wrote about the need to combine investment with staff capacity and clear Board priorities. Good people can still

be asked to do too many things at once. If every project is urgent, it becomes difficult to know which one should receive attention first.

The commercial picture was becoming more connected. Professional retainers, green-fee income, unused space, shop improvements and winter preparation could each be examined separately. Their larger value lay in how they fitted together. A better visitor experience could support income. Sensible investment could strengthen service. Clearer communication could help members understand why changes were being made.

Plans for a new Members' Bar were shared in September and received encouraging feedback. The existing room did not make the most of the Bay view. A bigger, brighter and more welcoming space offered considerable potential. There was still work to do. The proposal was progress, but it was not a completed refurbishment by the time of the latest blog.

The Bay Golf Festival brought more than two hundred golfers through the club during its week. The shop was busy, the till was active and the visitor business could be seen in practical form. It reinforced the case for looking after that audience properly. Visiting golfers contribute to the atmosphere as well as the finances.

GolfFest had its debrief, with lessons from 2026 and planning beginning for 24 July 2027. The point was to retain what had worked and improve what could be better. An event should not become immune to questions because everyone is pleased that it happened. A useful debrief gives the next organising team something concrete to work with.

The shop's autumn and winter work included stock planning for the following spring and summer. Simon, Steven and I considered what members were buying and where the opportunities lay. Blinds and air-conditioning were less exciting subjects than a new range, but comfort and presentation affect the experience. They deserved consideration on that basis.

In the latest week, we were taking headshots of the shop team. Getting everyone photographed, presentable and recognisable proved less straightforward than the task description suggested. The purpose was simple enough: help members and visitors know the people behind the counter, including their experience and personalities.

That felt like a fitting late development. Early Bare Up discussions had involved brands, investment and broad commercial opportunities. Now a set of staff photographs was part of the work. The scale was smaller, but the connection with service was direct. People make the experience, and knowing who they are can make approaching them easier.

The website was moving forward too, with Phill doing good work on the redevelopment. Preparatory material I had produced the previous year could be used

rather than recreated. Not every piece of work pays off at the moment it is done. Sometimes it becomes useful when the right project and person are ready for it.

The target was completion in early 2027, in time for the new season if all went well. The website needed to serve existing members and help prospective members, visitors and function customers understand the club. Green fees, sponsorship and other income opportunities were part of the purpose. It was an investment in communication and the customer journey, rather than simply a change of appearance.

The club's communications about 2027 subscriptions and its financial position were encouraging. Holding subscriptions was a significant choice against the pressure of operating costs. It reflected governance, financial work and decisions made by people who put considerable time into the club. Much of that work was not visible during a normal round or a visit to the bar.

I wanted it recognised. The weekly blogs had sometimes expressed impatience, but they also recorded how much progress was being made and how many people were contributing. A balanced account should be able to say that there is more to do while giving credit for what has already been achieved.

Not every experiment had a tidy result. Wee Jimmy, the small bear who had joined our Norway adventure, later travelled with a QR code and a request for people to report his progress. There were sightings across the UK and reports from the United States. Naga's sharing of the story brought a great deal of attention.

Attention did not guarantee follow-through. The system depended on people scanning the code and maintaining the spirit of the experiment. Many did; some did not. By January, his last known location was Rochdale. I retained the hope that he would return to Bare one day. By the end of this story, that was still a hope rather than a confirmed homecoming.

Wee Jimmy provided a compact lesson in projects that rely on other people. The idea can be enjoyable, the publicity impressive and the outcome uncertain. You need to understand the practical mechanism as well as the appeal. It was not entirely successful, but it was worth trying, and it supplied some amusement along the way.

The Thursday Nighters had supplied rather more uncertainty. In late September I faced the prospect of retaining the white jacket for the whole winter. The final round allowed me to pass it on to Adam, with Fuzzy winning. That was an outcome I could celebrate without requiring a spreadsheet or a three-year strategy.

Beyond work, there were walks, wine evenings, old friends and an imminent visit to see Barack Obama in Manchester. At the closing date, the event was still ahead. I could look forward to it; I could not yet write the review. The distinction is small but important in a story that has reached today rather than an invented conclusion.

Bare Up had become more focused than it was in March 2025. There were fewer major strands, with a deeper understanding of each. I was still learning where I could help, how much I could take on and when somebody else needed room to do their work.

I had not arrived at a final model for the rest of my working life. I had arrived at a working life I valued. That was a worthwhile result in itself.

Support when it matters

When I look back over these first months and years of Bare Up, the strongest impression is of people. There are projects, figures and plans, certainly. There are also colleagues who stayed in touch, founders willing to ask difficult questions, volunteers arriving to help, staff managing a busy day, members telling their stories and families looking for a piece of their past.

The business name gave me a way to bring that work together. It did not change the value of everything I had learned beforehand. It gave that experience a different setting and allowed me to use it with more choice about the people and problems involved.

I began with a broad idea of support. The journey has made it more specific. Sometimes support means asking a founder what the customer actually needs. Sometimes it means introducing two people who ought to know each other. It may involve a budget, a recruitment process, a survey or a loan agreement. In the shop, it may mean listening for a few minutes without trying to sell anything.

It also involves knowing when my help needs to change. A new manager should be able to manage. A Professional should have room to use his expertise. A historian or specialist may know something I do not. A staff member may need a clear priority more than another enthusiastic suggestion. My experience is useful when it serves the work.

There have been delays and disappointments. Some proposals remain proposals. Some questions have not found answers. A medal presentation did not happen as planned. A travelling bear has not made a confirmed return. My golf has remained resistant to any general theory of improvement.

There have also been results worth enjoying: charity money raised, appointments made, events delivered, members' views turned into actions, artefacts placed where people can appreciate them and family stories brought a little closer. I have enjoyed being part of those outcomes without needing to claim them as mine alone.

The personal lesson has been about how I want to spend time. Bare Up has allowed golf and business experience to sit alongside family, friendship, travel and local life. Sally Ann has been part of the story throughout, including the support, the celebrations and the entirely reasonable corrections to my view of my own domestic achievements.

For golf and business contacts reading this, I hope the familiar situations carry something useful. You may recognise the temptation to overcommit, the frustration of a delayed project or the discovery that a short conversation changes your understanding.

You may also recognise the pleasure of working with good people and seeing something become better because everyone has made a contribution.

The story closes on 11 October 2026. The website is still being developed, the club has plans ahead, the shop is preparing for another season and The PGA's collection contains more stories than my diary can accommodate. There is no grand final announcement. There is work I look forward to doing, and a clearer understanding of why I want to do it.

After a career spent across different organisations, Bare Up has given me a way to make the next chapter my own while remaining connected to others. I am grateful for that opportunity and for the people who have helped it take shape.

I will keep asking questions, try to listen properly and do my best to follow through. I will also keep making room for a walk by the Bay, a good evening with friends and a glass of something decent.

As for the golf, I reserve the right to blame the clubs again if circumstances require it.

Source note

The Bare Pit weekly blogs at bare-up.com provide the contemporary record behind this account, from the first entry on 4 March 2025 to the update published on 11 October 2026. The career introduction also draws on my previously recorded career history. The chapters bring related events together while following the development of Bare Up over this period.

The Bare Pit archive: <https://bare-up.com/>