

Stewarts of Edinburgh

Still going strong

THE name of Stewart & Co, Edinburgh has long been respected by golf club officials and greenkeepers in the UK and overseas. The company was founded in the autumn of 1894 when premises were established close to Edinburgh Castle, which became the company's trademark with the motto Stronghold. In those days, much of Stewart's business consisted of supplying seeds and plants to farmers, estate gardens and horticulturists. The company originally traded under the name of Low & Stewart, then in 1899 Low left the firm and J.C. Stewart, son of an East Lothian farmer was joined by John Lockhart Forbes, a keen golfer and international rugby player.

As trade expanded, the company started to supply sports clubs, schools and universities. The first golf club customer was Luffness, situated in the heart of East Lothian—Scotland's 'holy land' of golf. Subsequently, the company has always been linked with the game of golf by supplying many course requisites to all the famous clubs.

Stronghold Grass Manure and Grass Seed Mixtures became household names among turf experts and the greenkeeping fraternity. Mention of these popular mixtures appears in the golf historian Horace Hutchinson's book *Golf Greens And Greenkeeping*, which was published at the beginning of the century.

Stewarts have always maintained a genuine interest in the lot of the greenkeeper and, in 1902, they helped to organise the first outing of the Scottish Golf Greenkeepers, the acting secretary of which was J.L. Forbes. As the interest in golf increased, so did the reputation of Stewart's and their first customer south of the border was Royal Mid-Surrey Golf Club in 1904. The same year also marked the start of a long connection



A vintage view of Royal Dornoch—'Sown with Stewart's Stronghold grasses—an early sales brochure declared.

with the courses at St Andrews, which has continued ever since, and exhibiting at the Open Golf Championship. The 1904 Open was at Royal St George's—another customer. By this time, Stewart's reputation had extended to France and the Continent, where they were involved in a number of new golf courses.

Eventually, the firm moved to South Saint Andrew Street, where it remained for 65 years. A construction department was also set up by Stewart's and they began building golf courses, such as the East Course, North Berwick, and playing fields for Glasgow Academicals, near Anniesland on the outskirts of Glasgow, but all this finished in August 1914 as war loomed.

Stewart's signed their last pre-war contract in July with Granton Golf Club to build a new course by the sea on the north side of Edinburgh. A month later, the club secretary optimistically wrote to delay the start until 1915, "when the war was bound to be over." The course was never built and is now the site of a housing estate.

The outbreak of the First World

War brought all Stewart's Sportsturf activities to a halt and the firm had to rely on its farm, market garden and private estate connections to keep going. Unfortunately, many of the company's records of this period were lost when the top floor of their premises was requisitioned between 1939-45 as a fire service post.

When the First World War was over, Stewart's resumed their Sportsturf business and, soon after, they had built up an extensive connection with virtually every Open Championship venue and most of the major clubs, as well as a host of bowling greens, cricket and sports clubs.

In 1939, Stewart's formed a limited company and John Macadam joined the board. Once again, their Sportsturf business came to a standstill at the beginning of World War Two. In spite of staff and material shortages, the firm survived. When the war was over, they were back in business, although the difficulties of obtaining supplies of seed, fertiliser and other items through restrictions lasted for some time.

Stewart's were one of the first com-



Stewart's new premises at Dalkeith.

panies to offer a contract spraying service of selective weedkillers on golf courses and playing fields, which was much in demand. They designed special machines constructed like gang mowers to be towed by tractors and carry out this work on undulating ground.

The company also established a turf nursery at Archerfield, East Lothian on light sandy soil where they grew special turf from seed, a project which the firm carried on for a number of years. Stewarts are now distributors of Rolawn Turf in Scotland.

Stewarts have also given tremendous service to the sportsturf industry in voluntary and honorary capacities. The company has provided two presidents of the Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society and also two vice-presidents, and two vice-presidents of SIGGA. For many years, five of their staff have given lectures to greenkeepers' and groundsmen's associations, as well as horticultural societies. Two personnel have regularly taken part in BBC radio programmes and one has appeared on TV. Stewarts also provided a lecturer for the Edinburgh Royal Botanic Garden training course on turf culture. And two members of the staff have been awarded the Scottish Horticultural Medal.

In 1958, Bill Pender, one of the company's most popular representatives, joined Stewarts as technical representative and, in 1973, J.I. Stewart, son of the founder, retired from the company and so ended the connection with the family that had lasted for almost 80 years.

In addition to fertilisers and grass seed mixtures, Stewarts introduced many products for the benefit of greenkeepers and groundsmen. Among the most popular were nylon golf flags, fibreglass flagpins and the St Andrews Turf Switch. In addition to



Graeme Forbes.

this, they had the manufacturing rights for the Comb-It grass comb and the Stronghold electric shoe cleaner.

With the enlargement of the company's activities and the influence of the changing conditions of business, Stewarts decided to move from the centre of Edinburgh to an industrial site at Dalkeith on the boundaries of Mid and East Lothian, where a new factory and warehouse of 20,000 square feet was built. In addition,



Ian Forbes.

there are large areas for material storage required in manufacturing and space for expansion.

The move prompted a major expansion of the sales force. In 1976, Neil Macdonald joined the company. Neil is responsible for the north/east of Scotland and also carries on Stewarts' traditional advisory service. At present, he is acting as consultant to a construction project in Spain.

The death of Bill Pender in 1978 was a great loss to the company and to his many friends in greenkeeping. The company also lost their London agent the following year, but Mr Bithray has proved an excellent successor. In 1978, they also commenced the construction of a new compost plant and the conversion of the company's offices to a computerised system.

In 1981, Ken Waddell became field sales manager with special responsibilities for public authorities. Robert Bruce joined the firm and is now technical sales rep in the west and Alan Miller has taken over the south east of Scotland and north of England. The logistics are capably handled by Robin Davidson, who is a familiar face to most greenkeepers and groundsmen.

Stewarts have proudly completed 90 years of service to sport with major emphasis on turf culture for recreation and amenity purposes. At the moment, they are developing some new projects for the supply and installation of artificial surfaces.

The chairman is Ian Forbes, son of J.L. Forbes, and Graeme D. Forbes as managing director is the third generation to serve the company. Appropriately, the founders' original motto has proved a successful trademark, for Stewarts have maintained a 'Stronghold' in the grass roots of the sports and recreation industry and will hopefully continue to do so well into the next century.

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