

COMPANY PERSONNEL PROFILE – DAVID CRAIG OF PATTISSON

David Craig, 63, represents Pattisson, suppliers of equipment for golf courses and sports grounds. He is married with one son.

"My parents came from Arbroath," David said. "Father was a foreman engineer with Shanks. We moved to London with the company in the early 1920s before my father started a mower repair business in 1928. After leaving school, I studied to be a purser on Royal Mail Lines, but my training was abandoned by the imminence of war."

David's tall, muscular frame endowed him with all the attributes of a first-class athlete and he competed for London as a hurdler and sprinter. Once again, the outbreak of war overshadowed ambition, as it did for most young men. After a short time in the fire service as a dispatch rider, he joined the RAF and spent five years overseas as a wireless operator.

With demob in 1946, he followed his father into the engineering business. "Just after the war, transport was at a premium and we hired vehicles to pick up equipment for repair or I travelled on buses with my bag of tools to service machinery on golf courses.

"The main items of equipment in use then were Ransomes Mark 1 and 2 gangmowers, which were brutes to service. Handmowers, such as the Certes, Golf Lynx and the Lloyds' range, were popular. At that time, motor mowers really had not become fashionable – the Overgreen was in vogue and I remember spending a lot of time overhauling this machine that was considered labour saving. One man could mow 18 greens in six hours using the Overgreen.

"After my father died in 1953, I carried on the business until 1976. I then joined Pattisson as van sales rep. I enjoy working for this famous firm, which is approaching its centenary in the business. In the early days, they also made tractors and power units specifically for golf courses and sports grounds. A director invented the first hydraulic gangmower, but the prototype was never developed, which was a pity for it would have been a



David Craig.

great innovation then.

"My territory, loosely called the Home Counties, covers the south coast, Surrey, Sussex, Kent, Beds, Herts, Essex and London – seven counties in all with around 380 golf courses."

David is a popular figure at greenkeeping association meetings and tournaments. "I have a soft spot for the BGGGA, since my father was one of those instrumental in setting it up in the early '20s.

"I was disappointed that they never really progressed in the manner that the founders originally intended. This ultimately led to a split in the ranks and EIGGA was formed. I have nothing but admiration for the way this new association has organised itself."

With an extensive engineering background, did he have any predictions on machinery trends? "I think greenkeepers are well-served with all the sophisticated equipment now available, although I believe small tractors are going to play an increasing role in the upkeep of golf courses. The only thing I regret is our reliance on so much equipment from foreign countries.

"As I travel around, I am sometimes appalled by the dirty condition of machinery being put away at the end of a working day. Oil changes and lubrication are only luxuries that get done on wet days. During the cutting season,

you frequently see mowers badly abused, dumped in untidy sheds and left there with grass cuttings in the box.

"On the other hand, there are courses where the equipment is treated with care and respect. I maintain you can always tell how good a course is by looking in the machinery sheds to see how the equipment is cared for.

"Over the years, I have made many friends in greenkeeping, some were outstanding characters. Reluctantly, I'll single out two. Jock Glass (Thorpe Hall), who is now enjoying retirement, was the southern section chairman for many years. He did a lot at national level to raise the status of greenkeepers. He was an excellent chairman and, above all, a first-class greenkeeper.

"A completely different character was George Hitchcock, who looked after Coombe Hill. He was a perfectionist, yet a modest, humble man and one of the better greenkeepers of the post-war years. He was a great friend of Henry Cotton."

David recalled a final amusing story on the attitude of some earlier greenkeepers to the advent of labour-saving machinery. "I remember visiting a well-known club in the Wirral with my father to see a Ransomes Overgreen triplex mower being demonstrated. Quite a crowd of greenkeepers and club officials from neighbouring courses had been invited.

"On the green selected for the trial, the machine quickly came to grief with three damaged cylinder reels. After substituting a spare cutting unit and hasty repairs to the other two, the demonstration resumed. But the same thing happened again! I later learned that some of the greenstaff thought their jobs might be at risk through this new-fangled machine and had hatched a plot to put a spanner in the works. Nails had been dipped in green paint and then stuck in the turf to foul the mower blades!

"Greenkeepers today would never stoop to these tactics – they have come to accept progress and the industry has a bright future."