United we’ll stand!

Demonstrating that, ahead of the joint talks on forming a federation (see page 12), the three greenkeeping associations can cooperate to take on — and beat — the rest of the golfing world, our front cover shows the winning greenkeeping team in the 1985 Kubota Golf Challenge. From left to right: I. McLeod (Tain), I. Toon (Moor Hall), R. Hughes (Little Hay), J. Teixeira (Hillingdon), S. Melville (Murrayfield), A. Peel (Trafford), J. Donaldson (Cherwell Edge) and, sitting, B. Turner (Worplesdon).

This year’s event at The Belfry was a four-way contest, with teams of eight also representing golf writers, stewards and secretaries, who were the defeated finalists.

In the semis, the greenkeepers almost whitewashed the stewards — the only reverse coming in the last match with a defeat for Donaldson. The stewards beat the journalists 5½ to 2½ at this stage, but more than met their match in the final, only managing to take two matches off the greenkeepers — Hughes and Melville going down.

The attention later switched to St Andrews and the fifth Ransomes International Greenkeepers and Superintendents Tournament, where the Canadians were hot favourites to successfully defend the Ransomes Challenge Trophy. There was a record turnout with teams of four from 13 countries contesting a Stableford competition over 36 holes.

At the end of the morning round, only one point separated the leaders — Scotland stood on 45 and the Canadians had 44. A further point behind were the Dutch, Swedes and Northern Irish.

The wind proved difficult in the afternoon and it was the two teams from across the Atlantic that mastered the conditions — Canada returned a creditable 47 points and America 46. The Canadians retained the Ransomes Challenge Trophy with a total of 91 points. Scotland were second with 89 and the USA third a point behind. Only four points spanned the first four places — Northern Ireland came fourth — and, with three teams (Holland, West Germany and Spain) finishing on over 80 points, it was a close-run competition.

After the tournament, which is held every three years, the traditional Ransomes banquet was attended by 150 at the Rusack’s Marine Hotel where Keith Mackenzie, former secretary of the R & A and president of the Golf Foundation, was the guest speaker.

The Ransomes Challenge Trophy, a silver salver, was presented to the Canadians by the chairman of the St Andrews Link Trust Sir John Carmichael, who also gave tankards to members of the first three teams.

Ransomes sales director Guy Catchpole thanked the Links Management Committee for making it possible to play the Old Course. “It’s an appropriate venue because the tournament started as a result of Scottish greenkeepers, some 20 years ago, challenging their English counterparts,” he said.

Now turn to page 16
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The stress an Open success can bring...

THE sudden death recently, at 51, of Russell Brown, course manager of the Turnberry Hotel golf courses, venue for next year's Open Championship, emphasises the strains on those looking after the courses where the world's premier event is played, writes Jim Arthur.

It is usual for the press and TV commentators alike to fail to appreciate the problems in setting up the Open Championship. It takes years of careful preparation to stage and by no means all of it is pure greenkeeping, what with spectator paths, lorry-ways and the tented village, all of which fall on the back of the head greenkeeper. Even if he is not necessarily involved in all the decisions, it is he who has to implement them.

I recall after one Open, a BBC commentator designed to talk to the head man. He asked when the course would be back in good order again. The reply was along the lines of, "I rather thought it was right now." Likewise, when the weather intervenes, greens like those at Muirfield in 1980, where there were six weeks of rain prior to the off, are criticised and the fairways come in for 'too much irrigation' comments. In that particular case, it was a rather ill-informed statement as there weren't even pop-ups around the greens! Sadly, I feel some of those responsible are presenting courses not so much for golfers as for TV viewers.

The Open is not going anywhere new in the foreseeable future, if ever, so it is largely a question of starting preparations for the next one on the following Monday, repairing the damage off the course, for the course in itself probably suffers less during the Open week than in normal play. There is little time to relax and all too little time before the Open is back again.

Today, of course, the head men of all the Open Championship courses have seen at least one, if not several Opens, and can afford to be a great deal more relaxed, but it is still a worrying time and you always have to be prepared to give instant first aid in the event of accidents, such as hydraulic pipe bursts, or errant courting couples in Minis cavorting over greens just before the championship, which we suffered at Turnberry!

Turnberry was different - as, indeed, in a different way, was Royal St George's in 1981 where there had not been an Open Championship since 1938. In both cases, of course, the experts derided the R & A's choice - in fairness, not primarily on the basis of course quality and character, but over such aspects as accessibility, accommodation and car parks.

Turnberry was selected in 1974 as the venue for the Amateur Championship in 1976 and the Open in 1977. At once, the decision was attacked as mad by the Press and, looking at the state of the over-fertilised annual meadow grass greens and lush fairways, suffering from severe drought damage early that year, with only two years to get it right, you might have thought it was a bold decision.

It was my lot to be told by the championship committee to sort things out and much sorting had to be done. This included the removal of those who had become complacent, looking after courses that saw little play when the hotel shut in autumn. The management, too, was swayed, wanting a pretty course for television rather than the great test of golf, which many think is Mackenzie Ross' best links course and which it proved to be in 1977.

Monthly visits

I literally had to act as head greenkeeper with almost monthly visits until responsibility could be devolved on to Jim McCubb. We had to correct the mistakes of decades of mismanagement designed to make the courses look nice and green. The first task was to find some 500 tons of black, sandy, top spit soil for basic top dressing and the rebuilding of greens.

Nothing happened for three months. There were the usual excuses that it was not available until the man charged with the task was clearly given to understand that if he did not find it, someone else would and he would not be needed. It was found within a month.

Of course, you cannot reverse the mistakes of years overnight, but a good team convinced of the correctness of an agreed programme, well directed and encouraged by a skilful head man who developed new potential under the increased responsibility, generously provided with the tools (machines and materials) to do the job, was bound to show results.

In the event, the Open at Turnberry was hailed as a major success by the same Press that, only six months earlier, was prophesying doom and disaster. The Ailsa links were not, of course, perfect, but the course was eminently playable, with fast, firm greens, tight lies, good tees and especially good aprons and approaches. It provided one of the most exciting finishes of any recent Open - a two-horse race between Watson and Nicklaus, with the rest of the field nowhere. Only three players, including the two leading gladiators, broke par for the four rounds. So much for the Ailsa being criticised as too easy.

Virtually every aspect of greenkeeping had to be altered or reversed in 1974 and this included re-equipping both courses and updating the inefficient irrigation system. Because of the effects of the prolonged drought in 1975 and 1976 on the annual meadow grass-dominated fairways and the need to carry out intensive applications of fenpeat and over-seeding, the Amateur was moved, not so much because of the condition of the course, but because we needed to be able to carry out intensive remedial work.
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without suffering the restraints imposed by preparation for a major championship.

It is remarkable how short memories are. Within a space of two years, those same experts who derided the R & A’s choice and who said the course would never be ready in time were claiming, equally exaggeratedly, that the links were perfection personified. What is irritating is that these critics never learn and even last autumn one commentator was pontificating on the hotel steps that the course was dead, it would take years to restore and would never be ready for the Open in 1986.

A month later, when I saw the course in October after a week or so of rain, everything was perfectly satisfactory. The problem was that the course water supply depended on what was left after the hotel had taken its share and it was a very dry summer with an abnormal demand. We now have an independent bore-hole supply — so that problem is solved.

In 1982, Jim McCubbin retired and Russell Brown, from Perth, was selected to take charge. Previously, he had been in command at Prince’s which, while hosting Open Championship qualifying rounds, is a great track in its own right.

Even more investment in the courses was carried out by the new owners of Turnberry Hotel and Russell was in charge of implementing many quite major changes, advised by Donald Steel, to improve the Ailsa Course. One of the most significant was removing and recontouring a long length of dune top by the 6th green to provide greater space for pedestrian traffic, caught, in the past, between the 6th green and the 7th tee. Even a few months after massive cut and fill operations, the recontouring was so skilfully done (by Brian Pierson) that it looked as if it had been there for ever.

Even more spectacular were extensions to the 9th and 11th tees with massive retaining walls, built up, as Russell proudly told me last month, without so much as a trapped finger — a major engineering effort that we called Hadrian’s Wall and which, perhaps, will be his ‘memorial’.

The year 1985 was doubly worrying for anyone charged with preparing a course for an Open Championship in 1986. The severe drought of 1984 had left some remedial work to be done, but the winter, though not as severe as further south, was snowy enough to stop work and then came one of the coldest and latest springs anyone can remember. After an all too brief spell of fine weather at Whit, the Ayrshire coast suffered, in common with most of Scotland, monsoon conditions with almost incessant rain from June to mid-October. Ten inches of rain fell in September alone, ceasing, in fact, only on the day I carried out my regular examination of the course in mid-October. I was happy to find everything in excellent and promising order and the effects of the wet weather and heavy play on the greens were about to be corrected by Verti-Draining for the second year running.

Luckily, the Ailsa course can, as a hotel course, be closed for three months, which makes the preparation for the Open much easier, but it has been exceptionally busy all summer despite the rain. The weather has the last word and we are dependent on it, but a good greenkeeper can make intelligent guesses once he knows his course and Russell was beginning to do this with accuracy. He said that if you could see Ailsa Craig, it was going to rain if you couldn’t, it was raining! This was very true last summer.

To those who knew him well, Russell, although a quiet and rather withdrawn man, had an equally quiet sense of humour. His staff respected him and worked indefatigably for him. He was a first-class, skilled and caring greenkeeper and perhaps tended to keep his worries to himself too much.

Naturally, there was a vast amount of preparatory work still to do but, the very day before he died, Russell spent the whole day with his first assistant walking the course and detailing precisely the work programme for the coming months.

Greenkeeping has lost a most able, deep thinking and sincere man and as honest as the day to himself, his employers and his course. I have lost a good friend and an able ally who was interested in everything he observed. It is a great shame that he will not be there to take the credit for another great Open Championship at Turnberry for which he had made so many preparations.
Chairman's Message

As the end of 1985 approaches, I would like to take this opportunity to look back over the last eight months. I was elected EIGGA chairman by the board of management after the association's AGM at Warwick University during the national conference.

As chairman, you soon begin to realise how much effort and time is put in behind the scenes by the board of management and, in particular, the general administrator Danielle Jones.

Warwick was a joy and a disappointment to me. The joy was that we had people in our ranks who could stand up and deliver a paper good enough to hold the attention of the entire audience, as well as coping with lively question and answer sessions.

The disappointment was the poor attendance. Cost and time should not stop a keen EIGGA member from attending, so, please, let us see more of you at Warwick in 1986.

The marquee at the Open Championship was a great success. Board of management members worked very hard on your behalf and the visitors' book looked like a who's who of golf.

Greenkeeper training is moving along at great speed and I'm pleased to be joined by Peter Wisbey as EIGGA representatives on the Greenkeeper Training Committee. The phase three block-release has started in some colleges and will begin at most others in 1986.

EIGGA was well represented at St Andrews for the SIGGA conference and fifth Ransomes International Golf Tournament in October. David Jones gave an excellent paper on heathland management and there were other interesting sessions from all over the world, with a notable contribution from Nick Park.

In the Ransomes tournament, England was represented by a joint EIGGA/BGGA team of Kevin Munt and Terry Adamson from EIGGA combined with Jim Richardson and Gordon Payne. England finished sixth behind the winners Canada and runners-up Scotland. The Old Course proved very testing, but a great experience for all who played and watched.

Finally, we are holding talks with representatives from the R&A, EGU, SIGGA and the BGGA about a possible greenkeeping federation, which would operate from a central office. This idea was first discussed at St Andrews, where it received support from R&A secretary Michael Bonallack.

The discussions have only just started, but some progress has already been made and future developments will be published in Greenkeeper.

Meetings have also been held with the PGA about a possible joint organisation, but this development has been shelved for the time being.

Bill Lawson.

North West

The branch held its autumn seminar at the Reasheath College of Agriculture, Nantwich. The speaker for the morning session was Dennis Mottram, who is now senior lecturer at Reasheath. Dennis went into the technicalities of sportsground drainage in his usual articulate and professional manner.

To follow, Jack McMillan, who had travelled up from Sunningdale, chose the Verti-Drain as his subject for the afternoon lecture. Jack described the situation at Sunningdale, where he has found its implementation very successful. It was invigorating to hear an independent assessment of such a machine from an experienced and knowledgeable professional.

Jack was accompanied by his wife and we thank them both for making the trip north. We also thank Dennis Mottram and everyone at Reasheath for giving us all a rewarding day.

It was encouraging to see so many of the younger members sporting EIGGA blazers and ties and also to see some new faces from the Bolton and Manchester area. Members will have received a newsletter giving details of further lectures - please make every effort to attend.

The autumn golf tournament was held at the Abergele and Pensarn Golf Club in North Wales. Thanks go to the club captain for making us feel welcome. Thanks also go to John Richmond and his staff for their efforts on the day.

The tournament winner was Seve Lunt with a net 67 and the guest's prize went to Steve Stonehouse with a net 68.

Our thanks go to all the trade representatives who donated prizes - in particular, Ellesmere A.G. and Richard Jones for sponsoring the event and their continued support.

Bob Evans of Ruthin-Pwllglas