I n the dim and distant past, before pocket calculators made their mark as popular playthings, this writer would often struggle with the intricacies of a slide rule, failing miserably and gnashing teeth in exasperation. Thus if there is one thing guaranteed to make this math ignoramus gasp in admiration, it is the apparent ease and aplomb with which accountants skim through balance sheets, making huge mental calculations with nary a keyboard in sight. I will admit to the world that I hold the rarefied field of accountability in very high esteem indeed, I am in awe.

The subjects of my most recent Golden Key interview, Bernard Hedley and Clive Williams, are as unlike the popular conception of accountants as you will ever find, being extrovert, relaxed, fun to be with people — yet both began their careers in accountancy. Both are living proof that accountants are not the stuffy number-crunchers of popular misconception, being warm, sensitive, utterly charming human beings entirely tuned to the real world, empathetic and oozing charm. In a nutshell, these two stalwarts of the fine turf business that is Rigby Taylor are the power-houses that make the company tick, clockwork and precision-like, each contributing in his own way to making Rigby Taylor a force to be reckoned with.

Bernard Hedley, the chairman and managing director, is a Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants who began his association with Rigby Taylor in the seventies as their accountant, partner in a local professional practice. There is no doubt that from this privileged position Bernard was better able than most to recognise a good thing when he saw it, and when a management buy-out of Rigby Taylor was mooted in 1980 he was instrumental in seeing the purchase through smoothly, whilst also seeing the wisdom in returning to the old farm yard. That the policy works there can be no doubt, for with a field force of 28, coupled with their own agronomists, technical experts and back-up staff, together with distributors of their Mascot range, Souters, Spray-Chem, GCSE (Germany) and Lindsay’s, they are most certainly major league players in the sports and leisure business.

I like to dig a little in these discussions and was curious to learn more of company philosophy, the thinking behind the doing. Bernard was not unhappy with my suggestion that they are the big fish in the little pond that is the sports and leisure industry. ‘In the manufacturing context’, he told me, ‘I may draw a parallel with Marks & Spencer. We know where to go to get our own name brands manufactured, made to our own specifications, utilising ideas that we have devised and perfected. By definition I suppose we are relatively small in global terms but big in our field. Whether a client spends £200 or £200,000, the same philosophy to total service always applies.’ Clive chips in — ‘We are big enough to say to the major world-wide manufacturers, we will be your vehicle for new products in the marketplace, we’ll give you coverage in Britain and Europe. Big or small, the thinking behind Rigby Taylor is one of professionalism, of really caring about individual needs. We can concoct a one-off cocktail, package a special mix, as we have done just recently for an environmentally sensitive area, we’re quite unique in that situation. We’re different from normal distributors, we search for products that will fit a real need in the market place, we have our own technical staff who trial, test, write labels — everything that is necessary to bring fine products to the end user’.

If Bernard is the referee, Clive Williams, Rigby Taylor’s sales director, is certainly the team coach. He’s been in the business for what seems like forever, beginning his career as an accountant though soon realising that a sales career was his forte. He cut his teeth with the Murphy Chemical Company, working through the sales ranks and ending as their general manager, following this with a spell at May and Baker in their garden products section before joining Rigby Taylor in the spring of 1989. I think of him as ‘the happy fella’, indeed both he and Bernard I see as a jovial twosome who know the importance of communication. They talk together; campaign together; laugh together, get things done together — they’re kindred spirits.

The ‘happy fella’s’ task sounds simple enough, but it is a huge one none the less. His is the task of training and moulding the sales team, ensuring that their technical abilities match their selling skills. He coaxes, motivates, inspires. He’s hugely proud of his sales force, especially of their high level of technical knowledge. Both in the field and the sales office the emphasis is always on being recognised as experts.
Customers won't accept the advice of someone they don't trust

45 All are BASIS trained, constant updating when he says 'customers won't accept the advice of someone they don't trust. Most of our selling is done by giving advice, therefore the advice must be utterly believable, true and

way of saying thank you can be registered now on a national scale.

Asked what they would like to see for the growing profession if they could wave a magic wand, their reply in unison was for a greater awareness at club level - members, committees and green chairmen alike - of the professional qualities involved in caring for such a valuable asset as a golf course - the assets are massive, the recognition should be likewise.

Above all, they enjoy dealing with 'our' profession, expressing the view that it is populated by nice people with nice attitudes, that's a very comforting statement.

Keeping in touch with news and comment from the regions

AROUND THE GREEN

DEVON & CORNWALL

Happy New Year to you all! China Fleet G&CC was the venue for our AGM, held on Wednesday 11 November. The morning's golf was a foursome competition for the Toro Trophy, played over China Fleet's excellent new course. Our non-golfing members were treated to the customary 'course walk' by course manager Richard Shapland, who I hear had a few sleepless nights before our meeting. After lunch the prizes for the Toro Trophy were presented by Joe Turner of Lely and Alan Dommett of Devon Garden Machinery to: 1st A Woolnough (Teignmouth) & R Whyman (Bude) 29pts. 2nd D Manley (Mullion) & C Miles (DGM) 27pts. 3rd T Parkins (Dartmouth) & G Tamblyn (Mulloon) 26pts.

AGENDA & MINUTES

1) Opening of the meeting.
2) Approval of last year's minutes: Proposed by D Parr, seconded by W Potter - Approved.
3) Financial report: the balance sheet showed a slight loss of £15.82 on the previous year, which now stands at £806.63. The approval of the balance sheet was proposed by G Child, seconded by T Pipe - Approved.
4) Secretary's report: The secretary thanked all our trade members for their continued support.
5) Vice President - A. Dommett. Proposed G Child, seconded T Pipe - Approved.
6) Election of Officers:
   b) Secretary/Regional Board member - R. Whyman. Proposed G Child, seconded B Summers - Approved.
   c) Vice-Chairmen. J Mitchell, S Redman and B Summers were all re-elected en bloc.

SOUTH COAST

Our winter lecture programme got off to a good start in November, well attended by both members and guests. Our speaker, Alan Betts from the Forestry Commission, gave an illustrated talk which included details of grants which are available when planting woodlands.

On 3 February our guest speaker is Jim Arthur, who will be talking on 'Commonsense Greenkeeping'. In view of the expected large audience, the venue will be at the Dorset College of Agri-