It's hard to believe that 1997 sees BIGGA's 10th birthday and from the modest beginnings of a one room office within the STRI building the Association has grown to become a respected body in the world of golf with almost 6500 members and a reputation for excellence.

Just look at the success of BTME and the Learning Experience in association with Ransomes and the Golden and Silver Key sponsorship programme which has assisted the educational development of members and funded books and videos including the latest Golf Course Ecology video which has been acclaimed by everyone who has seen it.

With the Association becoming ever stronger who knows where it will be when, in 2008 BIGGA comes of age - using current progress as a gauge – BIGGA will have even more successes under its belt.

To mark the occasion of BIGGA's 10th birthday, Walter Woods looks back at greenkeeping before the formation of the Association and charts the progress made since then – and we've uncovered some old photographs of some familiar faces looking slightly less wrinkled!
How far we've come

Walter Woods, BIGGA's first Chairman, reflects...

Throughout the British Isles greenkeeping has been an integral part of golf organisation. Scotland in particular, where golf originated, always had hardworking proud men who pioneered their skills to all parts of the world where golf courses could be found.

Turf science, greenkeeping methods and golf course maintenance are all part and parcel of providing a well maintained golf course where golfers can play and enjoy the playing surfaces provided by the greens staff using skills which have been learned from our greenkeeping predecessors. Many years ago people realised that before progress could be made some method of knowledge exchange would be necessary so, to encourage this, golf outings with seminars were organised mainly to formulate discussion.

Before and after World War II many golf courses employed the combined job of Head Greenkeeper and Professional Golfer, a very well respected job mainly to be found at the bigger golf clubs. As golf progressed and become more popular Professional Golfers formed their own association leaving the greenkeepers to form or improve their existing one. These were located through England, Ireland and Scotland all of them working well with their own identity. People worked voluntarily with dedication to promote their trade and most importantly create an image which would be respected.

The Open Championship, organised by the Royal and Ancient Golf Club, attracted Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus, Gary Player and these three golfers had a great influence in golf. This was followed by the organisation of the European Tour who featured Seve Ballesteros, Sandy Lyle and Nick Faldo. As golf progressed and became more popular Professional Golfers formed their own association leaving the greenkeepers to form or improve their existing one. These were located through England, Ireland and Scotland all of them working well with their own identity. People worked voluntarily with dedication to promote their trade and most importantly create an image which would be respected.

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over a thousand members. The magazine to start us off in our communications was reasonable but unreliable and I doubt if we would have rested until it came under our own authority. The machinery exhibition was at that time talked about but we were not clear on what revenues to take as at all times there were people ready to exploit. Great care had to be taken. Greenkeepers image and dress code, with blazer and bowly designed badge, was our first priority. At first this was laughed at but it soon became accepted and the more proud members became. Barriers between Sections and Regions were broken down mainly because of greenkeeping problems and all of our worries and concerns knew no barriers.

The first Board of Management and subsequent Committee realised that if all ambitions were to be fulfilled a solid financial base would have to be made. Members subscriptions were our main source of revenue but increases were difficult simply because we had nothing to offer. The R&A still provided encouragement and financial support which allowed us to improve communications with a better, more educational, magazine. Neil Thomas made massive improvements with a business-like approach but often must have been frustrated by negative comments.

The Association improved slowly with a professional image being our objective. Many officials of authority in the golf industry considered us as a threat with the view that if we educated Greenkeepers their demands would become unacceptable. However every year some progress was, and is, made.

The magazine came under our own control providing us with additional welcome revenue. The exhibition was born at Harrogate with only a few loyal tradesmen giving support and has now grown beyond our own expectations. Our educational system under Ken Richardson covers all aspects of Education from the lowly bunker raker right up to Course Manager status. Membership has also risen dramatically rising from 1000 members up to over 6000 and eventually more will be attracted. The demand for education is on the increase and young ambitious greenkeepers realise that without the assistance of a well respected Association this cannot be achieved.

The Open Championship provides a platform for traditional British Greenkeeping to be shown all over the world. To assist the Course Manager to cover any circumstances which he might require a support team from the Association is provided, giving us the chance to show how professional we have become.

Ten years on I now see unbelievable improvements, far beyond any recognition, young men smart in their attitude, proud in their ambition, all representing their golf clubs but still all wanting to learn. This year I visited the Turf Management Exhibition at Harrogate which attracted 5,500 and must be the biggest Indoor Exhibition of its kind in Europe. In addition to this there were delegations from 17 different countries.

During the week there were also seminars, workshops and discussions organised mainly to stimulate more growth in education. On one day of that week I was lucky enough to be invited to the Association Chairman's Lunch and who was there but our own Lord Whitelaw who was still telling us to go forward and progress with confidence.

**WHAT PEOPLE SAY**

**Pat Murphy, current Chairman:**

"We didn't have a clue what BIGGA might become 10 years ago but it is beyond our wildest expectations. The progress we have made even in the last five years is unbelievable."

**Jack McMillan, 1988 Chairman:**

"What has been achieved over the last ten years is remarkable and a credit to the Board of Management and staff. Greenkeeping is a lonely business and BTME is our chance to get together."

**Cecil George, First Board Member:**

"BIGGA is going from strength to strength and I can only see it continuing along those lines. The next thing should be to build a championship golf course of our own."

**Ivor Scoones, 1990 Chairman:**

"At the beginning, what we've achieved now would have seemed completely out of our grasp. It just shows that with dedication you can reach for the sky successfully."

**Eric James, First Board Member:**

"BIGGA has advanced so rapidly and we are more professional now than we have ever been. I'm particularly pleased that our links with the CGSA are strong as I was one of the first UK greenkeepers to visit their show."

Who's that with the BIGGA Greenkeeping Support Teams?

Disaster struck the Scottish team's journey to the first Iseki Competition at St Pierre when the bus broke down leaving the team stranded. Chris Kennedy, Dave Robertson, Stewart Harvey, Andy Wilson, John Geddes, Billy Whitefield, Mike Mclnness, Charlie White, Vince Reid, Elliott Small, Jim Gray and Arthur Williamson. Apparently the lights also failed on the journey home!

Almost a complete set of Regional Administrators from BTME '93. Roger Willars, Midland Region; Elliott Small, Scottish Region; the late Norman Exley, South East Region and Gordon Child, South West and South Wales Region. Bob Lupton, Northern Region, was unavailable for the photocall.