As I mentioned last month I was due to pay a visit to the South West and South Wales Region which has been particularly badly affected by the Foot and Mouth Outbreak. Well I made the trip, which took in a Regional Heath and Safety course held at Bude and North Cornwall Golf Club, and I was delighted to have the chance to say a few words and offer a sympathetic ear in support of those who have been particularly badly hit. I was impressed by the manner in which the greenkeepers I met are facing up to this immensely difficult situation and passed on the thoughts and good wishes of their colleagues in other parts of the country.

I was certainly pleased to have been able to make the trip and it also gave me a chance of seeing the work of Richard Whyman and his team at Bude and North Cornwall Golf Club. It hadn’t been affected by the FMD, in fact it had seen quite a lot of play, and despite a hard winter it was in great condition. You could see that Richard and the team had obviously been busy through the winter.

Moving on to other matters, I was delighted to hear of the excellent response to the R&A funded survey which had been circulated by Mike Williamson. It is by your taking part in such projects that we on the Board of Management get a feeling for how well the Association is working and I certainly appreciate the constructive criticisms and observations that I have already seen coming out of the survey. You can be assured that these will be considered and discussed at the next Board of Management meeting.

At this time of year, when we are getting well into the season there is a greater emphasis on presentation and the need for our machines to be working to their best capability is important. With that in mind I have been pleased to see on my visits round the country more and more clubs now have a designated mechanic. To my mind this is the key to the job as it means up the rest of the guys to get on with their main work. We at Walton Heath are lucky enough to have one of the best mechanics and his work is really invaluable.

As I drove past Epson Downs, which is one of the highest profile events on the golfing calendar, their effort is certainly appreciated at the moment. You can be assured that these members at one golf club while the same sand is considered poor on other courses. This may be a result of the fickleness of the golfer, but clearly further work is needed to improve our understanding of the effects of installation methods, sand depth and maintenance.

With my greenkeeper hat on I’ve often considered collecting together samples of sand and presenting them to the membership so they can make up their own minds on what they want. Talking about fickleness brings me nicely to the weather. Having endured the wettest winter in our or anybody else’s lifetime I’ve been talking with colleagues in the south east and we reckon it’s now too dry and wouldn’t mind a little bit of water.

The point was brought home to me as I drove past the Derky in a few weeks time, and they had their watering system full on giving the track as much water as they could.

I feel that every day you don’t have the weather system is a bonus and just a touch of the real stuff would be welcome at the moment.

As I said we are a fickle bunch.