Not far from the Ransomes Jacobsen factory, on a huge industrial estate just outside Ipswich, is a road called “Ransomes Way”.

It is pure coincidence, the two are not related as, I believe, the road, was named in honour of the “Swallows and Amazons” author Arthur Ransome, who has connections with the area.

But wouldn’t it be great if the road and the company were part of a master plan because listening to Managing Director, David Withers, you become very aware that there is a Ransomes way – or more accurately, a Ransomes-Jacobsen way.

“Over the last four or five years we’ve focussed on three core principles. 1. You’ve got to build a relationship with your customer; 2. Build a good machine, which meets the customer’s unmet needs and 3. You’ve got to look after it for the whole life of the machine,” explained David, as we sat in his office overlooking the wonderful three hole golf course which has become such a feature of the Ransomes Jacobsen HQ over the last three years.

“If you do these three things, you’ll succeed in business. Get any one of them wrong and you’ll fail,” said David, who was honest enough to admit that the company had not always achieved all three.

“There have been times in the past when we did get one or more of them wrong.”

David is very much a people person and is keen that the team he has built around him contains individuals of a similar vein.

“I’m definitely a believer that you’ve got to build relationships. We don’t just sell a mower and walk away. It’s all about repeat business and that comes back to having the right people in place”

David Withers

“’I’m definitely a believer that you’ve got to build relationships. We don’t just sell a mower and walk away. It’s all about repeat business and that comes back to having the right people in place”

David Withers

the backup of a huge company in Textron.

“Generally speaking we have the public money with our Ransomes brand and private money with the Jacobsen, EZGO and Iseki brands.

In recent years if one side has been up the other side has been down and they have balanced themselves out.

“However we had the perfect storm in ’09 when we had a bad public year and a bad private year. We had to put a redundancy programme in place and had to shut the plant on a couple of occasions,” explained David, candidly.

One of the major problems was that the RJ dealers had strong inventories of machines in stock and were reluctant to order more until they had sold what they held.

“They were quite right and so they sold what they had in stock and we accepted the situation and didn’t push any inventory onto them. We ran the plant slow and lean and it was tough for us, but I’m happy to say that we didn’t lose any dealers during that time.”

While it meant a tough 2009 the following year and first half of this year have been more encouraging.

“Having sold what they held the dealers had empty shelves at the beginning of 2010 and needed to re-stock and with a decent year they ended the year with the same amount of inventory as they started so they had sold out what they have bought in so 2010 was a good bounce back year.”

One area which has particularly pleased David is the number of new customers they have attracted during the recession.

“We track our unique customers and last year we had 30% more unique retail customers that we
had the previous year,” said David.
A major success over the last 18 months has been the emergence of the Eclipse 322, the hydraulic free greens mower.
“That comes back to coming up with a machine which meets the customers' unmet needs and the Eclipse can control clip rates, cannot spill oil, gives a better finish and uses a lot less fuel thus reducing running costs.
“It means that there are people who are now considering us and saying ‘Maybe I’ll give Jake a chance,’ said David, who added that the company has now invested in three demonstrator vehicles which tour the country ensuring that potential customers can view machines at their absolute best.

Another area of huge investment by the company has been in the area of after sales and spare parts, which had been a weakness.

“We doubled the value of parts held in our inventory, which is not as easy as it might sound, as we have hundreds of thousands of individual parts with an inventory of 40,000 different parts numbers which we hold.

“We must get it right as it can ruin people’s jobs if we get it wrong and we are well aware of that.”

Ransomes Jacobsen has a very strong relationship with BIGGA and the other industry bodies which David has worked hard to develop and BIGGA is delighted that the company supports the Learning and Development Fund as well as sponsoring the soon-to-be-relaunched Safety Management System; the BIGGA educational scholarship scheme which has seen greenkeepers’ courses funded to the tune of over £150,000 since it was launched as well as other sponsorships including rucksacks for the BIGGA Open Support team.

“I get many letters from guys who have been given scholarships saying that they wouldn’t be in the job they are in now if it wasn’t for the fact that Ransomes Jacobsen had helped them through the BIGGA programme. I get a warm feeling when I read that.”

It is all part of Ransomes Jacobsen’s support for BIGGA.

“I believe that BIGGA is a great force for good in the industry and working together is good for BIGGA, good for us and good for the industry and it is still something I personally like to get involved with.”

All part of the Ransomes’ way!