**INNOVATION CORNER!**

We’re still hunting for the unusual innovations greenkeepers have on their courses – and Stuart Varwood, Course Manager at Lymm Golf Club, has several! He said: “When our deep slitting weekly during the winter we found the slitter removes the dew off the greens but left a little strip one inch wide in between the rear rollers. One of our lads, Robert Cooper, fitted a scrap piece of astro turf to cover the gap, and brush the little strip of dew off as he went along, leaving the surface right for our visitors and members.

“The next is our drainage trench gravel filling machine, or ‘Nellie’ as we call her, (after the elephant). It’s a piece of plywood attached to traffic cone with a length of hose bolted on. We can drop the tail board on the workman and fit it in this seconds. Then when we have excavated our drainage trenches, and installed the pipe, we can back fill the trench, by straddling the trench with the workman, large or small gravel in a fraction of the time by hand and without spilling a drop. Saves on shovels and backs.

“Thirdly, we found that some drains were capping over with grass clippings, wear and tear over time, and we needed to uncap these. We tried with half moons and by hand but it was very slow. We needed to uncap down 6” to hit the clean gravel then we could replace with clean and restore the effectiveness of the drain.

“So we purchased an old Sisis turf cutter (18” wide turf) and chopped and removed the cutting blade so that it can cut 10”. We now mark the drain line by finding the gravel line in the ground with a probe, and mark the centre. We mark the centre of the tractor bonnet, we drop the implement into the ground and it shaves out the waste material on top of the drain line to a depth of 6” to clean gravel.

“This is simply forked off onto a waiting cart and away to our compost heap. Really saves a monumental amount of time in a soul destroying task. I feel it’s hugely important to find an efficient way of doing tasks both from an operations and moral point of view.”

**JIMMY LEAVES NORTH EAST SECTION**

Jimmy Richardson has left the North East section after many years of service. He said: “Having served as Section Secretary I doggedly have decided to retire from all section duties and would like to take this opportunity to thank past Committee members for their support over the years. Special mention to my other two helpers Steve Pope and Russ Black. Steve has also decided to retire but Russ is staying on as Section Chairman.

“Here we have a young energetic Committee taking over headed by Simon Olver of Percy Wood GC I would ask all members to give him a lot of support as he’s working very hard on pushing the Section forward. Other members are Glen Baxter, Michael Gunn, David Wilkinson and James Parker.

“New competitions are being arranged as well as lectures and seminars for the Autumn and Winter so please support the North East Section as much as you can.”

**CHALARA ASH LATES**

Dr Terry Mabbett updates us with the recent news about Chalara ash dieback. Chalara ash dieback has been firing warning shots at the UK government’s management plan but the two latest salvos were right on target. The first shot from Wales hit one of the three main planks of Defra’s Chalara Management Plan below the water line, while the salvo from Devon was a top deck direct hit.

First main plank of Defra’s Chalara Management Plan (March 2013) is the creation of a disease free zone of counties around the western edge of England comprising Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, Gloucestershire and up through the West Midlands.

Underpinning the programme is assistance to forest and woodland owners of recently planted ash confirmed with chalara. They will be given grants to dig up and destroy the ash trees and plant with alternative species. General idea is to slow the westward spread of the disease from current hotspots in East Anglia and Kent/ East Sussex. Even if this generosity had been extended to the amenity and landscape sectors including golf courses (Greenkeeper International May 2013), and used to cover all recently planted ash (healthy as well as infected), success was unlikely considering this pathogen is disseminated by airborne spores and the sheer ubiquity and frequency of its common host.

Recent events are proving this thinking to be right. In May 2013 Chalara ash dieback was found in the wider Welsh environment at Ferrybridge (south of Caermarthen town) in Carmarthenshire. This leaves the door wide open for spores to be picked up and carried eastwards into western England by strong south westly prevailing winds.

But that is all ‘red herring’ thinking since chalara was actually identified in the west of England wider environment in July 2013 in woodland between Exeter and Torrington in Devon.

Forestry Commission (FC) did not reveal the exact location, although BBC Devon said the outbreak was at Byway Farm near Torrington. According to the BBC, FC said the disease must have been on these trees when they were planted in 1996/1997.

This is highly unlikely. After 16–17 years the disease would have already spread far and wide. In 1996/1997 Chalara ash dieback disease was still confined to Poland and Lithuania, and unlikely to have arrived that early in the UK on imported planting material. In those 16-17 years it has moved westwards from Poland to reach Pa de Calais in France.

**BLOGGING AT TRENTHAM PARK**

This month’s featured blog is from Professor Ian Hunter, Head Greenkeeper at Trentham Park Golf Club.

He started the blog using ‘blogger’ in January and has already had over 7,000 views – plus it’s improving the communication between Leigh, his team and the members. He said: “After improving the club’s website the year before I wanted a clear concise way of communicating out to the membership.

“I also wanted to give them a way, and means of asking questions, and for me to answer them honestly and truthfully.”

“Often get members stopping me on the course telling me how much they enjoyed reading it and comment on how easy it is to understand, I think they appreciate the honesty.

“The thing that has worked out best is the ability for members to comment on the blogposts. So if they don’t understand anything they can always say.

“I think an important thing is not to ignore the complaints that come through. If the greens are bad then explain why.

“I use ‘blogger’ which is free and enables you to post pictures and videos to it completely free. It’s connected to your Google account so everything blends in well, and is easy to use.”

“What advice would he give greenkeepers thinking of setting up a blog?

“Take your time deciding on what you want. Try to get it integrated into the club’s website, so it’s easier for your members to find.”

See for yourself at http://trenthamparkgolfclub.blogspot.co.uk

**GI NEWSDESK**

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