Billy McMillan pays tribute to his friend...  

Starting at Old Randfurly golf club in the early sixties as an apprentice, Billy was soon hooked on greenkeeping. He was number 27 on the register of young greenkeepers taking up a formal education in Scotland at that time. Once qualified he soon took on the role of Deputy at Old Randfurly then Paisley.

In the early seventies he became Head Greenkeeper at the Randpark Golf Club in South Africa - not only was this a big move for him personally but also a massive learning curve in the management of warm season grasses. Creeping bent grass was on his agenda, and with great initiative he managed to get his hands on some seed, introducing it into his green during dormant conditions to give his membership quality surfaces year round. This was not a simple thing to achieve with sanctions going on at that time. He actually managed to have this grass seed smuggled in on the back of his then club captain’s business of importing American cars with a trunk full of bent grass seed - stashed away for a timely door to door delivery.

In the mid to late seventies home beard – maybe he missed the charm of wet feet and a cold wind - and after a short spell as Head Greenkeeper at the Vale of Leven Golf Club he was off to the acclaimed Royal Dornoch Golf Club. During his time there he enjoyed presenting the course for many fine amateur tournaments such as the Scottish Ladies, Home Internationals and the British Amateur.

By 1985 he decided to see what England had to offer and took up his role as Head Greenkeeper at Beaconsfield. An avid reader, Billy boasts at home a collection of books that would be the envy of many, with publications from Kipping, Dickens, and Robert Service as well as greenkeeping to choose from. He not only has a marvellous ability to recall information but can recite it in such a way you are hooked and entertained, ensuring it will be an experience to remember for anyone that has had the privilege to be in his company.

I remember lying in bed at many a HTME with the silence being broken with a rendition of some Scottish ballad drifting through the night as Billy returned to his room. You now may think a greenkeeping career was all that he aspired to - but you would be way off the mark. He has lived a well-rounded life and for many years has taken part in local church events and runs a youth club for all the local children in his village. Serving time on greenkeeping committees he has been hugely instrumental in the establishment and development of the BIGHA section in recent years. With a spell as chairman of this section he has always been quietly working away to better the role of the modern day greenkeeper in the area.

A wonderful career is at an end, so from all your friends Fiona and Billy and all your grandchildren a happy retirement filled with happiness and health.

Dr Tony Mubbett

PHOTO EDITORS

Bill has been succeeded by Stuart Langhorn who spent eight years as Course Manager at Adwickbury Park Golf Club.

Stuart commented: “I’ve been seeking a new challenge and this is a great opportunity at a stunning golf course - their ambitions match mine. I’ve spent six weeks working alongside 8th. When you join somewhere new you always wonder whether it’s going to be a little awkward working with the person you’re replacing, but it soon won’t be further from that here. Bill is a top bloke. “His job here has been his life. He’s been much more than a greenkeeper. He’s arranged Christmas parties, he puts the Christmas trees up, he’s done so much work with the Artisan section… you name it, he’s been involved in it.

“I intend to continue the terrific work Bill has done here. I’ll be continuing the woodland management project he started and also the layout of the new paths. Then it’s likely to be working on the greens, bringing up the putting speed, and reviewing and investing in our machinery fleet.”

GI NEWSDESK

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SHINING BEACON BILL RETIRES

GOVERNMENT ARRANGES ASH GRANTS (BUT NOT FOR GOLF COURSES)

The recent Chalara Management Plan released by DEFRA lacks any uniform and equitable assistance for landowners and organisations affected by the disease.

Grants will be given for removal, destruction and disposal of recently planted common ash and replanting with alternative tree species, but this only applies to a selective swathe of counties in Cornwall, Devon, Gloucestershire and up through the Midlands. The aim is to allow down east to west disease spread and help create a ‘Vhalara free’ zone in westernmost Eng- land. The Royal Forestry Society describes the plan as a ‘postcode lottery’ but worse still it excludes the amenity and landscape sector and therefore golf courses.

Simon Ellis, marketing director at Crowders Nurseries in Horsnasse Lincolnshire, which currently holds 250,000 healthy ash trees, told Greenkeeper Inter- national: “We are about to destroy the entire stock. They are unsalable and difficult to manage. Many are up to ten years old which means a decade of investment down the drain with no compensation from government.

“This plan is selective, divisive, iniquitous and unfair. Grant aid will only be available to forestry sector landowners with planted ash sites funded under the Rural Development Programme for England. It excludes the amenity and landscape sectors but it is they who buy our larger trees. I don’t see why grants should only be given to the ‘sanded gentry’ and withheld from entrepreneurs building and maintaining leisure complexes, golf courses and other sporting facilities.”

Small trees planted by big forestry landowners are typically purchased at around 20 pence ‘a throw’.

Simon and others in the nurs- ery trade met with Defra and put forward specific plans to assist the amenity and landscape sectors, including golf courses, but this has clearly been ignored.

Dr Tony Mubbett

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