KEITH KENSETT

Everyone at BIGGA was shocked and saddened to hear of the death of Keith Kensett of R&K Kensett in September.

One of his many good friends in the industry is Peter Bradburn, an expert in the start up of golf course businesses in the UK and Mediterranean for the past 20 years.

He said: “It is unavoidable that in a small industry such as the turf and golf sector we are all going to lose acquaintances and colleagues over the passing of the years. But the unexpected news about Keith will create a void in many people’s lives.

“It was first introduced to Keith over 15 years ago, in another country on another grow-in but it was struck by his dedication and tenacity in getting the message across, his way was the right way of doing renovation maintenance and that was that!

“In the intervening years, I have listened to, discussed with and learnt from him on a whole range of subjects to do with growing good grass. It was not unusual to receive a call from him late in the evening as he returned from a job and would want to bounce an idea off you. That was the kind of guy he was and you just loved him for it: inquisitorial, inventive and resourceful.

“Knowing Keith, you invariably got to know his family and the extended clan that is R&K Kensett. Sadly his heartfelt sympathies and condolences go out to Jane and the boys during this time and the team at the family business.

“I run a whole day of free education presentations during the Wednesday of the show at a sweltering Windsor Racecourse – with CPD credits available for those attending.

“Again we attracted experts from across the industry. Andy Wood, Course Manager at Robin Hood Golf Club, presented on greens drainage and was followed by Stuart Varwood’s seminar on managing and constructing bunkers on limited budgets. Stuart is Course Manager at Lynn Golf Club.

“The day’s final seminar was from Dr Simon Watson – Syngenta Turf and Landscape Technical Manager – on winter disease on golf greens. Dr Watson is pictured above.

SWEET CHESTNUT BLIGHT UNCENSORED

Most people are now aware of the story so far surrounding the first UK finding of Cryphonectria parasitica (blight) in November 2011 at a farm in Warwickshire on sweet chestnut trees (Castanea sativa) planted in 2007 and sourced from a nursery in France. However, tucked away in one of the mass mail reports regularly produced by the UK plant health authorities (this one by Food and Environment Research Agency [FERA]*) is an account which raises a considerably more complex and higher risk situation.

First infected trees in the UK were indeed found in November 2011 at the unnamed Warwickshire farm, but on trees planted in different time frames and on different sites, having arrived at the farm along different distribution chains. Eighty of the infected trees were planted in 2007, having been sourced from the French nursery, but an additional ten infected trees on a different site were planted later. These were purchased from a nursery in Devon which had sourced its stock from the same French nursery.

By the time the UK plant health authorities started to investigate, the nursery in Devon had sold all of its sweet chestnut stock. A Forestry Commission (FC) rapid pest risk analysis FERA report shows how some 90 consignments of potentially infected trees were dispatched to sites across the UK.

The report says subsequent trace back through the records of both the French nursery and the UK supplier, by the Plant Health and Seed Inspectorate (PHSI) and the FC, led to the identification (as of April 2013) of nine further UK sites with infected trees. PFS focused on distribution of consignments of more than 10 trees leading to 30+ infected trees being found on an East Sussex farm and two infected trees at a private residence in Herefordshire.

By May 2013 PHSI had additionally traced infected trees to seven private residences and one additional nursery mostly in southeast England.

The risk of sweet chestnut blight establishing in the UK does not end there. FERA says the vast majority of trees supplied by the French nursery into the UK were sold mail order by several different distributors, and that customer lists for deliveries made prior to 2011 are difficult to obtain.

Keen to see the government has rushed to ban imports of sweet chestnut from known blight infected areas in Europe. If all goes pear shaped then the government will no doubt claim it took appropriate and timely action. However, with potentially infected trees at apparently still unknown locations in the UK it could already be too late.

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GREAT AYTON WINS McMillan TROPHY

Congratulations to Craig Ayton, greenkeeper at Foxhills Club & Resort, who won the Surrey Section McMillan Trophy held at Sunningdale. Craig scored 40 points to win the competition, which was held on the New Course. Here he is being presented with the Trophy by Jack and Rita McMillan.

CHRIS IS NEW HEAD AT PRESTWICH

Chris Harding is the new Head Greenkeeper at Prestwich Golf Club in Greater Manchester. Previously a Deputy at Dunham Forest Golf & Country Club in nearby Eccles, Chris has joined the 18-hole parkland course with the intention of making his mark in his first Head Greenkeeper role.

He said: “It’s a challenge and it’s one I’m really looking forward to. My first focus is to improve the greens because they have suffered with thatch here.

“It’s a very pretty course, we’ve recently had it renovated, and it’s one I’m currently interviewing for a third member of staff.”