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 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 peoples’ lives.”

“I was first introduced to Keith over 15 years ago in another country on an another grow-in but I 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 inevitably get to know the his family and the extended clan that is R&K Kensett. My heartfelt sympathies and condolences go out to Jane and the boys during this difficult period.”

Most people are now aware of the story so far concerning 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 media reports regularly produced by the UK plant health authorities (this one by Food and Environment Research Agency [FERA]*) is an account which reveals a considerably more complex and higher risk situation.

First infected trees in the UK were indeed found in November 2011 in 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.

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.

FC 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 southwest 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. No wonder 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.

SWEET CHESTNUT BLIGHT UNCENSORED

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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.