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Scott MacCallum met up with Victor Jamieson of Rain Bird at the home one of the company's highest profile clients...

'Bird's in The Belfry

The venue for a meeting with BIGGA Golden Key Company, Rain Bird, was not too difficult to agree. With a substantial distance between BIGGA HOUSE and the company's UK base, at Lewes, near Brighton a point between the two was the preferred option and where better than The Belfry, the scene of Rain Bird's biggest and probably highest profile, UK contract to date.

Having won the initial contract to install full fairway irrigation to the recently-built PGA course, Rain Bird was in pole position to secure the contract when the famous Brabazon course was upgraded and a full wall to wall irrigation system was agreed upon. On a real roll now De Vere Hotels decided to go the whole hog and fit out the Derby course as well and again Rain Bird were chosen. So now the company can boast that it has supplied all 54 holes on the development which will be in all the headlines later this year when the Ryder Cup is played - for a record fourth time over the Brabazon course.

"It was good news because the fact that we won one job, completed it and then won the next shows how pleased De Vere was with what we had done. Pleased with the product and pleased with the work carried out by the contractor, MJ Abbott," said Victor Jamieson, Rain Bird's Area Manager for UK and Ireland. "However, it is not just the high profile contracts which brings a smile to Victor's face, he is also delighted at the number of regular golf clubs, many of which perhaps hadn't until recently considered installing automatic irrigation systems, which he now counts as clients.

"Smaller golf clubs like the Rain Bird product. They like what our new sprinklers provide and they like the reliability of the decoder systems which have been around now for around 12 years and have good track records."

Another benefit of the Rain Bird systems from a smaller club's perspective is that, like an over grown school boy's train set, you can start in a small way and then build on what you've got.

"You can start with our smallest wall mounted controller and at any time in the future add on to that system. Even our smallest system can be extended to a PC controlled system without changing the hardware out on the golf course," explained Victor.

He is also finding that more people from smaller golf clubs are asking for specific products having heard from neighbouring clubs on the benefits.

"It used to be only the big clubs who asked that. Smaller clubs just asked about an irrigation system in general terms," said Victor.

The company, which has its roots in Los Angeles, California, has enjoyed substantial growth in the UK and Ireland over the last five years and Victor has a theory on why that should be the case.

"I would put it down to our insistence that our product is installed well and we only supply to certain contractors who we know will do a good job - companies like Ocmis Irrigation, MJ Abbott, Arden Lea Irrigation and a number of smaller but equally skilled companies. They have been doing a very good job for Rain Bird and this has helped to enhance and spread our reputation.

"After all you are only as good as your installer because if things go wrong, customers tend to blame the equipment rather than the installer," said Victor, who added that only 20% of a contract covers the cost of the equipment, the other 80% is the cost or the installation.

Having teams of good quality installers is not something that can be put down purely to good fortune. Much work is done on building sound relationships between Rain Bird and the contracted companies and ensuring that they are up to date on the innovations that emerge from the Rain Bird Research and Development boffins.

"We give a lot of assistance to contractors with regard to installing our equipment to our specifications. They get a lot of training, particularly on the control systems, from our full time Service Manager in the UK, Mark Gunning, who can be on hand to provide technical assistance at all times.

"Having said all that we are fortu-
nate that the contractors do take pride in producing a quality installation.

One of the benefits Victor finds in working for a privately-owned company is that they are not weighed down in as much bureaucracy as might be found in other companies of similar size.

"For example we can talk directly to the engineers who are developing our product and we can send requests to the States to develop new equipment for use in the European markets.

While Victor feels the current family of Rain Bird golf course controllers will probably remain much as they are for the foreseeable future they are having what he describes as the "bells and whistles" becoming attached to them now.

"It started with the radio remote control facility and we now have a telephone remote control so a greenkeeper can be sitting at home, discover it is raining, dial in and stop the system. Likewise he could start all or parts of the system from home if he wanted to."

Over the last five years Victor has witnessed a startling rate of progress in the industry much of it made possible by the increased knowledge and ability of the greenkeeper.

"More and more greenkeepers are trained to use PCs whereas a few years ago the technology did not appear relevant. A lot of them are using their irrigation systems properly as a result and taking full advantage of the control that is available to them. Five years ago a greenkeeper might have run all his sprinklers for five minutes every night in the summer regardless of whether it had been sunny or raining. If they were a little more conscious of their system they might make some percentage adjustments day by day to everything on the course.

"Now people are making adjustments down to the specific sprinkler head to cater for high or low spots and other factors that might prevail." To assist in the development of the greenkeeper's irrigation knowledge Rain Bird puts on training courses.

"We put one on at Celtic Manor recently and it was great because they also act as refresher courses for people who perhaps need reminding of how to use the system at the beginning of the new season," explained Victor.

With as much rain as many parts of the country have endured in recent months you would have thought selling irrigation systems would have been set alongside the task of selling ice cubes to the Eskimos and Victor admits he is praying for a long hot summer.

"It has been a tough time particularly for the contractors who often haven't been able to complete the work they began during the winter as quickly and efficiently as they would have hoped and I think if the wet weather does continue over the summer I think it is going to make it very difficult," he explained, adding that from his side he has attended several Extraordinary General Meetings at golf clubs torn between installing irrigation systems or not as the case may be.

"These have got heated at times and yes I have got involved at times as well. There is still the odd member who thinks that bowsers should still be used on links courses and doesn't see the benefits of irrigation as a management tool. Used properly it shouldn't change the condition of the course. For example, used for the establishment of overseeding the benefits are enormous. In the past overseeding work, and therefore money, could be wasted if the weather was not as expected and irrigation gives a guarantee that there will be some success."

The benefits of responsible irrigation are becoming increasingly well known and that is why companies like Rain Bird continue to enjoy success - a brand new European headquarters have just been opened in Provence in France, to take advantage of the growing mainland Europe market.

The continued growth of golf there will be apparent in the Ryder Cup when Europe's finest 12 golfers, probably containing a few Continentals, compete against the Americans over the beautifully manicured Brabazon course at The Belfry. Victor will be watching, proud of the small part his company will have made to the success of the event.

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The BIGGA Scottish Conference was held at the Business Learning Centre, Lauder College, Dunfermline on Tuesday March 6. This was our fourth visit to the BLC which over the years has improved its facilities and is now regarded as one of the best Conference venues in the Central belt.

The speakers provided us with a variety of topics, all relevant to the industry today. In the morning session we had Peter Joffard leading the way with his talk on 'Top Dressing and Rootzones Today'. This was a most informative and topical subject. Next we had Sandy Amrit, from the Double A Trading Company, who explained in great detail the care and maintenance required in taking care of your machines.

After the break we had Jim McKenzie, Director of Golf for Celtic Manor Hotel G&CC, who led us through the construction of the golf courses at Celtic Manor and the problems associated with such a large project, but also the tremendous satisfaction in having been involved himself. TIm presented a first class paper on 'Control of Black Layer in Fine Turlt'. Our thanks to Tim for taking his own grinding machines, Peter's talk on the Secretaries' Association fixture took place at Kilbirnie GC on Tuesday April 3. The Secretaries were looking for revenge as they had been beaten quite soundly last year in the corresponding fixture.

Things didn't look too good weather wise, but the first three matches were out. It was pretty miserable at this point, however, things improved and it remained dry but windy which seemed to suit the Secretaries as their line pairing convincingly won the first match against our Chairman and partner. Things evened out and with one match still out on the golf course the Secretaries were leading by five matches to four and it was looking good for them. However, the stab in the kingdom came good in the shape of Derek Scott and Stuart Sime who squeezed home by one hole to earn us a draw.

We therefore retained our trophy. Wins were recorded by Archie Dunn and George Brown, Jim Paton and Ian Barr, Steven Sullivan and Douglas McNiff and George-Morrison and Derek Wilson... and, of course, the heroes from Fife.

On Friday 15th May the BIGGA Scottish Conference will be held at Kilbirnie GC for affording us the facilities and use of the clubhouse. Considering that it is pretty early in the season Jim Paton and his staff at Kilbirnie are producing a course in such fine condition.

Finally and with the last word to Andy O'Hara, who was sharing a car with our heroes, Derek and Stuart, he states and I quote, "I would like to congratulate in producing a course in such fine condition."

North

Another batch of new members to welcome to the Section this month. First of all Andrew Macrae and George Duncan, from Golspie GC, then Edward Brown, from Montrose GC, Colin Irvine from Craignac GC, and Paul Murray from Ballumbie GC a new course near Dundee. I hope you lad's can get along to our outing this month on the 17th at Brechin GC. It will be the last regular outing of North members.

There has been a change of date for our Autumn outing to Keith GC, we now go there on September 6 instead of the 13th, so put that in your diaries, further details will be sent out in August.

Spares a thought for Stuart Robertson and his staff at Craige Hill GC near Perth. They built a new tee this Winter and came into use this Summer to find sandhils had taken all the new tied turf off and ripped it up. Work this winter has been hard enough without added problems like that.

The Scottish Greenskeepers' Championship will be held at Drumoig GC in Fife on June 12, not too far away from our area, so let's have a good turnout from the Section. The BIGGA National Championships is at Royal Birkdale and Southport near Altrincham. I'm sure this is a chance to play at an 'Open Championship' venue, which will be well worth the travel involved.

The evenings are beginning to stretch out with the weather starting to get warm so I hope for a bit of growth and a good summer ahead to make up for the awful winter we have just endured. I didn't realise there were so many shades of green! Iain Macdonald

East

Well here we are into another season and still looking for some decent weather. The committee are putting the final touches to our list of fixtures for this year so if you haven't had it by now, apologies for the delay.

But back to golf, if you read this we will have had the first major of the year, the spring tournament at Dunbar Golf Club. The report will be in next month's magazine so let's have a big turnout and some good weather to go with it. I look forward to seeing you all at Dunbar as does our Chairman Tom Murray and the committee. We hope to welcome along some new faces to what is always a great day. People on the move this month are Brian Divine who has been an assistant greenskeeper at Ratho Park GC for nine years. Brian is moving on to Niddry Castle GC near W-inchburgh as an assistant greenskeeper so all the best for the future in his new job from the Section.

Also the best to anyone else on the move that we don't know about. The Section committee has changed the time of the meeting to the last Wednesday during the year as we previously had. I think this is better for everyone as we all have so many days away from work ie, golf outings, conferences, seminars, boat, etc. I hope it works. Anyone would be great to bring up at the next meeting get in contact with a committee member and it will be discussed at the next meeting. The date of the next meeting is Tuesday May 15 in the Harrow Hotel, Dunfermline. Details of the committee is hoping to run the annual dance this year after we had to cancel last year's due to unforesee circumstances. Details will be announced soon, so come on and join us at the annual dance and your Section. The social committee will be resurrecting the skittles nights and the quiz night that were so successful a few years ago so watch this space for forthcoming events in 2001.

Central

This month we extend a warm welcome to new members. They are Andrew Ramsay, from Bishopbog Golf Club, John Mylles, Chris Smith, and Gavin Speedicall, from Findlay Greens Golf Courses and, as I say every time, hopefully we can show you all at some of our events in the near future.

The proposed football match between the Central and West Sections did not take place last month as planned for some unforeseen reason (the West Section felt that Dundee was too far away from Glasgow). It's the same distance both ways! A practice match was played instead, when the Dundee team (or should that be bhoys?) took on the rest of the Section, a hard fought game ensued, resulting in a four all draw, giving team manager, Andy O'Hara, plenty of choices when selecting his team for the challenge match when a suitable venue can be arranged. Andy is still seeking a successor for the position of team manager so if anyone is interested, just get in touch with him and he will fill you in on all the details of what is involved, including salary etc.

Congratulations and every success for the future go to Section member Bobbie MacMillan. Bobbie has been an assistant greenskeeper at Leynair Golf Club in Inverness which is situated in the town of Avoresses ten miles from the Icelandic capital of Reykjavik.

I recently attended a meeting of Section Secretaries at BIGGA, G&CC House and all in all the Section outings on numerous different subjects it appears that we all have the same problem in getting more members to participate in anything other than golf tournaments. So congratulations to Todd Greenkeeper at Leven Golf Club in Fife who is now in the position of Secretary and is keen to get more members to participate, may we see you at some of our events in the near future. Even if it's a change of Secretary!

On the subject of golf tournaments, it has been suggested that the committee organise another one, maybe an event in December, just before Christmas, with a social function (Lap Dancing was actually mentioned!) to follow. Anyone interested? Seriously, if you are interested in any event being organised please let us know.

At the time of writing entries for the Spring Tournament at Scots Craig Golf Club are fully subscribed, so if you wish to enter your entry for the Autumn Tournament which is being held in September by courtesy of Murrayshall Hotel and Golf Courses in Perthshire, please return your forms in plenty of time.

The proposed football match between the Sections is Murryshall are something else, so don't forget your camera.

On a personal note I would like to thank everyone who called, sent their best wishes during my recent stay as hospital, hopefully by the time you are reading this I will be back at work. Thanks everyone. John Crawford

West

Welcome to May's West Section news. Hopefully by the time this report is print-ed we will all be experiencing some warmer and good growing weather. For those of you who have not yet had the West Section played Maryhill police on March 20 and...
had a convincing 6-2 win. The goal scorers on the day were Kevin Collins (2), Sandy Brawley (1), Gerard Bruen (1), Eddie Roberton (1) and one goal from the policeman who joined our team. Man-of-the-match on the day had to go to Alastair Taylor in goal who pulled off a string of good saves to keep our lead intact. Gerry would like to thank all who turned up on the day and hopes it will encourage more Greenkeepers to put their name’s forward for future games. Watch this space for future games.

New member’s to be welcomed to the Section are Steven Laird, Renfrew GC; Stuart Crossan, Pollok GC; Christopher Lunanera, Pollok GC; John Kelly, Shotts GC; Andrew Muir, Paisley GC; Iain Mcfarlane, Whitecraig’s GC; and Craig Drummond, Paisley GC. We hope to see you all at the up and coming section outings 6 events.

Congratulations are to be extended to Gerard Bruen who has been appointed Deputy Headgreenkeeper at Williamwood GC. Gerry has worked with myself for the last eight year’s at East Kilbride GC and is looking forward to working with him every success in his new position. 

A moderator’s meeting was held in the East Kilbride Hilton Hotel on March 22. The meeting was well attended by DB2/3 assessor’s. Several key points about keeping your certificate current and better communication between assessor’s and training provider’s were covered.

Ronnie Bunting and Sue Godsone, GTC, stated they were pleased with both the turn out and the content of the meeting. Well that is about it for this month, I hope you all have a good season.

Brian Rolland, 01355 268662

PS. I know I spelt Houllier wrong in the last report, apologies but, it’s not as if it is the first, time Gerry’s name has been miss-spelt.

Gleneagles Chapter

My name is Ian Morrison and I am writing to introduce all students and full members to a new initiative created this month between BIGGA, Textron and The Gleneagles Hotel. The new chapter incorporates Gleneagles’ own student scheme called the Gleneagles Excellence in Golf Award Scheme (GEGAS), with the new student chapter initiative from BIGGA.

The GEGAS scheme has run for eight years and was originally conceived after a review of several college courses, which included golf management, turf science and sports turf management. The concept behind the scheme was to offer students a sandwich year that would identify their needs, skills and ambition to succeed in their chosen profession, whilst allowing them to develop within an environment that is committed to training and personal development.

Gleneagles select eight students from colleges worldwide, and now due to a new initiative from Director of Operations, Ian Richardson and the newly renamed, PGA Centenary Course for the Gleneagles Scottish Championship, the Scottish PGA Championship and the WPGA Invitational all to be held here this year.

The involvement from BIGGA has arisen from ideas by Ken Richardson, education and training manager for BIGGA, and talks with Jim Barclay, Director of Turfgrass at Gleneagles. Both have recognised the need for students to have their own representatives within the profession, for students to have a voice at BIGGA regional and national conferences as well as a network of managers, superintendents and experienced contacts throughout the industry that they can approach for ideas, help and support.

So that is the history, and why BIGGA, represented by Ken Richardson and Scott MacCallum, arrived at Gleneagles on April 3, to present the GEGAS students with their Student Chapter Membership. The students included Christopher Baldock, Robert Coughlan, John Milne, Lee Relf, Keith Walton, Andrew de Wet, who was appointed secretary, and myself, Ian Morrison, who has the honour of being the first Chairman of the Gleneagles BIGGA Student Chapter.

We intend to utilise all the opportunities that are now open to us and would like to hear from other students, college and employer who might be interested in setting up similar student chapters within their respective organisations. So until next month thank you to BIGGA, Gleneagles, Textron and Scottish Grass Machinery for the fantastic opportunity to prove that students are dedicated to making a difference within this great profession.

Please contact me on 01764 694429 for details or just to say hello.

Ian Morrison

North Wales

Firstly, the following notes of appreciation should have appeared two months ago, however there seems to have been a mix up at HQ.

Two committee members have left the Association and industry to go to positions new. Phil Davies has left to concentrate on his family-run business. We are all indebted to Phil for the professional way he went about his work in all aspects of our industry, from greenkeeper, through sales and education, his enthusiasm and knowledge always shone through as the winter lecture programmes he originated showed. He will be a hard act to follow.

Gary Edwards has also left. Our Section Secretary for the last three years, Gary took up the position when the Section was in decline and only ever missed one committee meeting. He was instrumental in getting our Section some of the best...
courses in the world to play on and tried to get a balance to cater for all our members to ensure people didn't feel left out. He achieved that and in the last three years there will have been a tournament not far from you. Our best wishes go to both of you.

In March, I went to a couple of free seminars. The first was organised by DCE Focus where papers were delivered by Rufford Soil Technology and Alderburgh Atlantis Systems among others. I know most of you are familiar with Rufford's but I'd never seen the Alderburgh drainage system before - it looked the way forward to me. I think I was the only greenkeeper there and I even got a CPD certificate.

The next seminar was at Conway GC organised by the WGU. It was superb and well attended with speakers including Alistair Boge, David Williams, Ken Richardson and Derek Green with the WGU President, Mike Cole, chairing proceedings. We are very lucky to have a governing body which is so committed to greenkeeping in Wales, remember they even give grants for greenkeeper training. Hats off to a very forward thinking Union.

Congratulations are in order to Tracy Schofield (nee Williams), greenkeeper at Vale of Llangollen GC, on her wedding in Memphis in January and Paul Lowe on his appointment as Course Manager at Rhuddlan GC.

Welcome to new members Alwyn John, Dylan Hughes, of Pwllheli GC, and Chris Grain, of Borth Ynyslas GC.

Danny Fitzgerald has moved to Penrith GC. (Hey this is good I'm getting information).

The Midlands Section has challenged us to either paintballing or karting - transport to be provided, cost approximately £20-£25, in the autumn/winter. Any interest contact Trevor Johnston Tel: 0151 336 6675. Also Sportsworld are organising a match against the Midlands at Northop on May 23. Anyone interested contact Terry Adamson Tel 07775 621272.

Talking of Sportsworld I attended their seminar at Garden Park in April. It was very well attended and very well put together, however, "Poa Annua. Our Friend," I think not.

Our spring tournament was held at Rhuddlan GC but unfortunately the rain came again and the comp had to be played over 11 holes. It was a real shame as the course was immaculately present-

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North East
April 5 was the day we played our Spring Comp at Wathorne GC. We would like to thank the committee for giving us courtesy once again and to Alan Darby, Head greenkeeper, and his staff for the excellent condition of the course everyone who played will vouch for that. The day started with an excellent 9 hole links with the scores been on rather the high side nevertheless I will only print the trophy winners... 

North West
The Mere Seminar in March was an excellent day, and although applications had been slow coming in, we finished with 80 including speakers.

East Anglia
By now everyone should have received a copy of the future list for this year, our first meeting will be over. Our thoughts will be concentrated on our courses and the season to come, no doubt that by July we will be in the middle of a drought and there will be a hosepipe ban (Ho Ha). If any member has not received a fixture list please contact me on 01728 452759 and I will send you one.

On March 26 & 27 I spent two informative days at BIGGA HQ with nearly all the Section Secretaries throughout the country, the meeting demonstrated to me how hard all the staff are working on our behalf. As everyone knows last year was a bad year for all concerned in our industry, machinery and fertiliser sales affected by the weather and a lot of our courses under water for long periods. This has caused some companies to cut back especially on sponsorship, but it is good to know that the team at Aldwark are out there fighting for the sponsorship and the income needed for the running of the magazine, competitions, awards and benefits for the membership. There is an open invitation to those who wish to visit BIGGA HOUSE, you only have to make a telephone call and you will be made most welcome; remember that all the staff are working very hard on your behalf.

If any member has a problem that BIGGA can sort out, the team will be there to help them in any way they can, also for more information try visiting the BIGGA website: which is going from strength to strength.

Under Ken’s watchful eye the Education Department is making huge strides forward with courses at HQ and others in Regions and Sections up and down the country. On this note did you know the everyone is entitled to help with training from the Government. The initiative is called and Individual Learning Account which entitles you to £2000 of training per year. It pays 50% of the cost of computer training and various percentages of other training.

To apply for your account phone 0800 072 3768 and apply for an application form. Please remember that in order for our Association to progress, we must give the team our full support, they are there to help us all.

Ian Willett.

Surrey
Surrey Section Committee met on April 4, the agenda was as follows...

- Roles and Responsibilities
- 2 Tom Smith - Canadian Trip and SISIS Bowl (a report from Tom will be printed in next month’s report) 3 Fund Raising 4 Winter Lecturers, Visits, Quiz Night Exc. 5 Any Other Business.

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