all headed down to the first tee in anticipation of a great day on the well-presented course (though I say so myself!). Months of intense preparation saw the course in fine fettle and there was an air of optimism on the tee as our determined group set about their business. The gloom cast by the heavy cloud cover was negated handsomely by the Christmas cheer being dispensed by the ubiquitous Vic Maynard and the Ernest Doe party bus.

Kev was doing his best David Bailey impression on the 1st tee taking photos of each group before the off. These shall all be adorning our webpage by now so have a look. After a couple of holes the threat of rain lifted and we were all able to take advantage of the now ideal conditions. High scores were the order of the day for most but, ultimately, none could come close to matching that of our website guru, Danny Stunt, whose winning score of 48 points off a 24 handicap was nothing short of daylight robbery! Wonderfully, that’s two years running that a 48 point total has taken the prize!

Full results as follows: 1. Danny Stunt, Chislehurst; 2. Paul Rudkin, Sundridge Park; 3. Russ Bain, also Chislehurst - They obviously get a lot of time off to practise!

After a great game an equally great Christmas dinner followed served by Birchwood’s finest. Our AGM followed and I would like to thank Peter Todd for joining us at this point to explain the proposed constitutional changes to our Association. The rest of the AGM was whizzed through by Kev with the status quo being preserved for another year. A fun raffle with some very comical, seasonal prizes ensued raising plenty of laughs (see website photos!).

At the end of the night everyone who attended was given a bottle of wine together with next year’s fixture card with details of another five events for you to enjoy. A fun raffle with some very comical, seasonal prizes ensued raising plenty of laughs (see website photos!).

What a day! We ended the season as we started at Upminster with rain. The Essex Golf & Country Club hosted the Christmas Progressive Stableford and AGM. The day started with heavy rain, which dampened the course, so much so that at 9.30am half an hour before we were due to face the shotgun start the greens were flooded. But it eased as we left the confines of the clubhouse and rain in the wind was all we had to contend with for the first holes, after that the day turned out quite well with the opportunity to discard the waterproofs and swing the club around a bit better.

The golf was interesting and entertaining due to the format of two scores counting on the first six, three on the second six and all four on the final six - with par for the team being 108.

The AGM was held after the golf and was attended by around 65 members and Guests and our Sponsors. The proceedings were chaired by Don Clark our out-going Chairman who was later returned to the position for another year. Don thanked all of the Committee, our sponsors and Clive Osgood for their support over the past year. He also congratulated all of the winners of our Section competitions and the Pairs Knockout, plus our teams that represented the Section at National level and the team that played the Surrey and Sussex Sections in the annual three-way battle.

The Treasurer, Tom Smith, announced that we had made a small profit over last year but the end of year audit is early and not a true representation of where we are really at. We still had two Section events to run and our new Seminar - the money for these should really be out of the 2008 accounts. So we do not have as much in the coffers as would appear. He hopes that the 2009 season will attract the same if not more sponsors for our Section, as we would like to run a bigger education seminar in our 2009 season.

Antony Kirwan, our Competition Secretary, stated that we had had a good turn out of members throughout the year but we will try next year to encourage more to both join and play in our matches. Next season we are to play at the following courses: spring: Colne Valley, summer: Burnham-on-Crouch, autumn: Cannons Brook, winter: Stapleford Abbots, Christmas: Orsett. Antony expects the tee off times to be a bit earlier next season due to the late evening finishes and as most of our members have early starts the next day the committee feels that the earlier starts would be better for everyone. We intend to send five members to the National Championship later this year, the format of how we select the players will be decided at our next committee meeting (watch this space).

Clive Osgood outlined the proposed changes to the constitution to be put forward at the National AGM; these he stated were available to read in last month’s Greenkeeper International. He thanked the committee for their hard work over the past year.

All members were last year elected for a two year term so after Don Clark was returned as Chairman for a further year and there was no any other business the meeting was closed and dinner was served.

There were after dinner speeches and thanks to the Essex Golf and Country Club for entertaining us for the day, Chairman Don thanked the club, Food & Beverage Manager, Chris Hill, and Chef, Kelly Smith, for a fine meal, and for looking after us so well. Seniors’ Captain, Ray Mabbott, replied for the club, he was joined by his Vice Captain, Roger Farnon - they both accompanied Course Manager, Martin Forrester, in his team on there own course, having dined with them I know that they enjoyed the day and Ray spoke very well of his adventures in I think to him a new format of play.

After the speeches Ray presented the prizes to the winners. Spring Trophy at Upminster – Richard Linin, Summer Trophy at Warley Park – Antony Kirwan, Autumn Trophy at Three Rivers – Sam Anderson, Winter Trophy at Bentley – Andy Cracknell, and the Matchplay Knockout – Mark Stoppes/Mark Keysell. Trade Golfer of the Year went to Mark Keysell (Rigby Taylor) and Golfer of the Year – Antony Kirwan.

There then followed the presentation of the Christmas winners: 1. Bentley - Mark Stoppes, Neil Peache, Dennis Johnson, Alan Levett; 2. Channels - Richard Dunmow, Malcolm Smith, Kyle Smith, Nick Tutton; 3. Orsett 2nd Team - Jeff Taylor, Stuart Rodger, Michael Hockley, Richard Herring. The Longest Drive and Nearest the Pin were both won by Daniel Hughes, Forrester Park.

Thank you again to The Essex for a nice day.

Next season I’m hoping to have a new look website for you, so watch out for that.

Please contact me at essexbigga@talktalk.net or call me on 01206 852353/07764862337

www.essexbigga.co.uk

Arnold Phipps-Jones
Press Officer

Greenkeeper International 61
Happy New Year to everyone. I hope that the new “email invite” system worked for everyone last year, and you all got an invite to the Christmas Tournament okay. Please can anyone who didn’t get an invite let me know so I can add your name to the lists. Similarly, if you change Providers or Addresses – again, please let me, and Justine at HQ, both know.

Might I suggest a New Year’s Resolution for us all – visit another club nearby to you, where the greenkeepers may not be active members, tell them exactly what’s on offer here in the South West, and persuade them to come to at least one meeting this year. Tell them that there is a committee of local greenkeepers – who are giving up their time and working hard to improve conditions, status, stature, and prospects within their industry. Tell your friends – it can’t be done alone – full support is needed, now more than ever. Join your Association and support the industry.

Thanks and congratulations to Jane Jones, Chris Sealey, and all the Regional Board for the excellent Regional Seminar at Cannington, back in November last year. The STRI ‘Disturbance Theory’ guys were on top form – and I certainly felt a lot less disturbed by the end. The theory has evolved significantly in a year, and I was really glad I attended. It was also very nice to see John Pemberton and Tracey Maddison join us for the day, and it was interesting to hear John explaining how the Association needs to move forward, and how we all need to carefully consider the future direction.

Further Excavator Safety Training days are available in the New Year, as are Chainsaw Training Courses. Do please let me know any other issues or training that you would like covered or arranged.

A Section Seminar is planned for early March featuring major industry issues. Watch this space!

And finally - Back at ‘Minch we’ve had yet another break-in at the New Course – (three in 18 months now). The work’s mobile rang at 9.30pm on a Monday night – I should’ve known better than to answer but rashly picked it up without thinking.

Yep – it’s the alarm monitoring company – the New Course greenshed intruder alarm’s gone off and as the named keyholder, could I get over there and sort it out. My sons and I jump into the car and drive straight there. When we arrive, we pull down to the sheds – pitch dark in the middle of the golf course, and can immediately see (a – the door’s been forced open, (b - the alarm box’s been smashed off the wall, and (c - the lights are on inside. As we turn the car, the lights inside the shed promptly go off. Ah...

Had it been at home – we might’ve attempted to storm the building – however as it’s at work – we retire to a safe distance up in the main car-park and dial 999 on the car phone. The police come on immediately saying there’s been a rash of break-ins that evening and they’re very stretched, but the helicopter’s in the air and it’ll be sent to the area asap. “Stay on the line in case there’s a problem,” ordered a terse voice. “Wow” we think, suitably impressed. Within a couple of minutes we can indeed see the helicopter – the only slight snag being it appears to be hovering over the Old Course (four miles away). We check on the phone – postcodes and all. The response is at once patronising and insistent - “Of course we’re in the right st*ding place – and the helicopter can see a single person making off on a pushbike”. “We’ve got some ground forces moving in – is anyone authorised to be in the immediate vicinity of your premises at this time of night?” “No certainly not” we chime – “don’t let him get away”.

Tick–tick–tick of a bicycle being ridden carefully into the night, which was harshly interrupted by the multiple slamming of car doors, the hasty drawing of truncheons, and someone yelling “There he is Lads – GO – GO – GO!!”

(By now there’s the sound of panting and heavy running footsteps, and the bicycle’s suddenly going tick tick tick tick tick). This was followed by the muted sounds of a scuffle, and someone screaming - “place the shopping bag on the ground, and move away from the bicycle!” followed a little less certainly by – “keep the walking stick where I can see it”.

At this point a new, forceful, and outraged voice was heard bellowing phrases such as “Young Whippersnappers” - “Dunkirk” - “El-Alamein” - “Why did we bother?” - “Dinner with the Chief Constable” - “MP” – and - “My Solicitor....” Finally we hear a sheepish “Well – ahem-thank you for your assistance with our enquiries sir – do enjoy the remainder of your ride home”.

With that the voice comes back on the line - “The New Course you say?” “Yes” we chorus wearily giving the postcode yet again. Within seconds, the helicopter’s overhead and no less than seven squad cars come screeching into the car park, and completely ignoring us trying to direct them, disperse all over the golf course in mainly the wrong directions in a spray of mud and loose grass - before someone reverses back into the car-park and asks us where the buildings are. Just when we thought things were settling down, the dog unit arrived complete with baying Alsatians and Rambo in control. It was difficult to tell who galloped into the sheds the faster (scattering valuable Forensics and DNA everywhere) – Rambo, or the dogs.

Unsurprisingly, by this time the villains were nowhere to be seen. Have a very peaceful New Year and enjoy Harrogate Week. If anyone has some proper news – please, let’s have it! 

Paul Worster paulw@mgnco.uk

DEVON & CORNWALL

Hello everyone, hope you all had a relaxing and peaceful Christmas. With another year underway one of my initial thoughts is that we have a drier more seasonal summer generally as the last three have been somewhat wetter than average!

The 12th was the date of our November meeting at Bowood Park Golf Club at Lanteglos, on the edge of Carmelford in Cornwall. The weather was very pleasant, somewhat surprisingly as recent days had been mainly rainy ones! The course was presented in an excellent condition by Rob Cook, Course Manager and his team, with the fairways - I’m sure Rob won’t mind me mentioning, surprisingly dry and firm given the recent weather, a credit to him and his team! I myself normally play golf but on this occasion was unable to get there early enough so I caught up with the course walk at the greenkeepers complex.

Barenburb and Cornwall Farmers sponsored the day and the golf was won by Tony ‘Jacko’ James, Head Greenkeeper, Killow Park, 39pts; 2. Richard Antenen, Bigbury GC, 35pts; 3. Richard Shapland with 31pts. The winner of Nearest the Pin was Jim Sheehan, Head Greenkeeper, Truro GC, and Shaun Warren won the Longest Drive.

A big thank you to Bowood Park and all the staff, especially the caterers for the wonderful meal!

A special thank to George Sheils, our guest speaker for the day, for his ‘How to keep your course open during wet weather’ topic on the course walk and ‘How Green’s staff can help your club survive the credit crunch’ speech after our meal.

Thank you to Graeme for a successful ‘Communication’ course, and thank
you to Launceston GC for the free use of their facilities, the feedback was very positive but a shame more senior greenkeepers didn’t take advantage, especially considering the low cost. A reminder the spring workshop will be held at St Mellion Golf Complex on March 4 on the subject of Machinery set up, fault diagnosis, health and safety and a grinding practical and theory session. If there are any subjects you would like covered please contact Graeme or myself.

Jerry Cole 07764 224582 greenwaysjrc@aol.com

SOUTH WALES

Hello everyone. Hope you all had a great Christmas and a Happy New Year. A quick update, Henry Stead who has been writing for this column has been very busy recently and has passed the responsibility on to me, so a big thank you to Henry for the work he has done in the past.

Ok, firstly the Christmas competition, which was held, as is the tradition, at Pyle and Kenfig Golf Club. The weather held off to enable a reasonable turn out to play on a golf course that was in superb condition. Well done to Paul (PJ) Johnson and his staff for all their hard work.

The results were: 1. Andy Roach, Haverfordwest GC, 33pts; 2. Darryl Bray, Morriston GC, 30pts; 3. James White, 29pts. The silver salver prize for best scores throughout the season was one by Andy (I’ll have to get a bigger mantelpiece) Roach. Nearest the Pin was won by Alan Abel (who narrowly beat Andy Roach’s shot) and the trade prize, for which Andy thankfully doesn’t qualify, was won by Peter Holstrom.

One of the golfers playing that day was Ian Kinley, who has recently been appointed as Course Manager at Royal Porthcawl Golf Club. Ian announced his arrival in Wales by blasting a huge drive down the 18th to win the Longest Drive competition. Croeso i Gymru Ian! Welcome to Wales.

A big thank you to the sponsors for the day, namely Vitax, who have sponsored this event for as long as I can remember. To Joe Crawley, UK Sales Manager for Vitax, for taking the time to think of different prizes every year. This year it was cases of wine that Joe thought would make people forget about the credit crunch, and everything else for that matter!

Thanks again to Paul and his team for the excellent golf course, to P & K’s Captain, Mr Jeff Vincent, for attending and presenting the prizes, to Pam and her staff for the excellent Christmas dinner and to Julian Bartlett-Jones for being more than capable MC.

On the education front, the winter series of lectures starts again in January, details of which will be sent to you shortly. Your support is vital for their continuation so get yourselves down there! If you require a lift - phone a rep!

A get well soon message now to an old colleague of mine, Andy Matthews at Mountain Ash Golf Club. Andrew has been fighting the big ‘C’ for a few years and just when he thought it was gone it came back with a vengeance, leading to major surgery in 2008. So get well soon Andy, and when you are well enough to return to work, have Phil Huish give you some easy jobs to do i.e. the ones he normally does!

Also get well soon to Gary Humphries at Llanwern Golf Club. Not sure what’s wrong with him but the words ‘two bricks’ was mentioned.

Thanks to all our sponsors for the golf events of 2008. Here’s to seeing you all again in 2009.

Ceri Richards  celticceri@aol.com 07831168645
“THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS BAD WEATHER, JUST THE WRONG CLOTHES”

Whoever uttered those insightful words might well have been a greenkeeper. Cold, wet, windy or muddy conditions need not stop the well-kitted-out greenkeeper from getting on with the job. Often, it is during extreme weather conditions when so much greenkeeping work can be carried out without the nuisance of golfers on the course. But having the right clothing and footwear is not just about getting the work done; just as importantly, it is about keeping the greenkeeper dry, warm, comfortable, healthy and safe.

For winter and wet weather work, probably the two most important pieces of greenkeeping kit are a good set of waterproofs and some sturdy waterproof work boots. The old adage that “you get what you pay for” applies here, just as it does in so many things. Purchasing the right standard of gear should be regarded as an investment; it will mean that your greenkeeping team will stay healthier, happier, be more effective in their work and lose less time to illness. For sure, this is one of those times when prevention is better than cure!

A suitable waterproof jacket should be long enough to sit on; this will mean that when bending or sitting, the wearer’s lower back and waist will be well covered. The fabric must be tough enough (tough does not have to mean heavy) to withstand contact with gorse or brambles and it should be breathable so that the wearer remains comfortable even under the most energetic working conditions. The fit and construction of the garment must allow for ease of movement and the capacity to accommodate other layers underneath for colder weather. An integral hood is an important extra for extreme wet weather. Over-trousers should demonstrate the same waterproof breathable characteristics as the jacket and should have an adjustable waist plus zipped leg cuffs to allow for easy putting on and removing over boots. Most over-trousers will slip down a little during work and for safety reasons it is wise to consider wearing braces to prevent trousers dragging on the ground.

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ALL GOOD THINGS MUST COME TO AN END

As I write my final article, it is with some amazement that the year has passed so quickly - we are now already back at Harrogate Week and into January, for what hopes to be a fantastic exhibition and education forum. I believe it is a must for Greenkeepers and Groundsmen alike - indeed any other sports’ Managers would also benefit from attending the week, meeting exhibitors and looking at planning for the year ahead.

Our new Chairman, Peter Todd, is taking over at a tough time but I believe he will be an excellent Chairman and help the Association build bridges in all sectors of the market place.

It will be an extremely busy year, speaking from experience, and it is fantastic that he has the support of his Club in such a tough financial climate. My own advice for him is just to be aware of how quickly the year passes - before you know it you are half way through.

At the moment we are now seeing the backlash in the economy, especially on the golf courses as we are in our traditionally quieter months, and financial decisions are having to be taken with regards to staffing levels and costs. It is important that we can improve our versatility over the next few months and hope that we at least get a good start to the year, in terms of weather, to encourage the golfers to return to the high numbers in the spring – something that we haven’t really seen in the last few years.

I always seem to be talking about the weather, but hopefully we can have a positive outlook in 2009 and we can have a big year with golfers responding by coming to the courses in their droves.

Great weather allows us to produce a higher quality of turf, again something that hasn’t really been open us is in the last few years with the prolonged wet weather. This, in turn, might see new golfers coming to the courses to play. In turn, we have to be more open to all levels of people and standards than we have perhaps relied upon in the past. Pricing issues may be addressed this year also which will again open up the availability of golf to families and a wider audience.

Finally, I would like to thank my family, Maria, Iain, Ruth and Cameron for their support in my role as Chairman over the last year. Also, my employers the Quinn Group, and, in particular, Nigel Gray, for allowing me to attend at lot of events, on behalf of the Association, and allowing me to make a big commitment to the benefit of BIGGA.

It has been my privilege to enjoy this opportunity and I have learnt much and met with many great new and old people within the industry.

I look forward to seeing you all at Harrogate and best wishes everyone for 2009.

Kenny Mackay
Chairman

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