Chairman’s Word

BIGGA National Chairman, Andrew Mellon, gives his thoughts for the new year.

25 more years to celebrate

As you read this, I hope you have all had a good Christmas and are off to a good start in 2012.

As I write this, my 12th column, I find myself trying to think ahead and plan for what will be happening and where we will be.

In these changing times this is something that is harder for everyone now, across every part of society. However we must learn to look for and exploit all the opportunities that such an environment creates. There is no point in dwelling on the difficulties. We need to be able to adapt, and sometimes think outside the box to find ways of dealing with what we face.

I believe that Greenkeepers are naturally good at this, as we are constantly managing an environment in which some of the aspects change rapidly, outwith our control, yet the standards demanded by our customers is ever higher. We have always been innovative in finding solutions to meet these demands.

That all sounds easy on paper doesn’t it? The reality is a more difficult situation, and one which is not easy to face alone. Many mistakes are made along the way, lessons learned, difficult consequences faced, but hopefully we get through those and come out stronger on the other side.

To me this has been the main benefit of my membership of BIGGA, I always have someone to turn to and will find someone who can shed some light on a problem I’m facing, has been there before, got the T-shirt and can help me find a solution, or at least the best way forward in dealing with any issue I have. In what can sometimes seem a lonely job, that extra support goes a long way!

I have spent some time reflecting on my time as Chairman over the last year, and it has been without some significant challenges and major changes, as well as many highlights. I’m honoured to have had the privilege of serving the Association.

As we celebrate our 25th Anniversary this year at Harrogate we will reflect on the many successes of our members and supporters and the impact they have had on the Golf Industry in which we all work.

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We all need to reflect occasionally. We also need to rest and re-charge the batteries, and I hope you at least got a short holiday during the festive period to do just that. But we also need to look back to what we’ve learnt and face new challenges and major changes, as well as many highlights. I’m honoured to have had the privilege of serving the Association.

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We have learned a great deal together, all of which will be put to good use by the Board, the CEO, and the Staff as they focus together on the future of the Association. We are engaging with the Sections and Regions to ensure we align our resources and efforts to the benefit of all Greenkeepers. I’d like to recognise and thank everyone for their commitment to this work.

It naturally impacts on wider stakeholders, the beneficiaries of your labours – the golfers, the clubs, proprietors, and their associations and professional bodies. We are communicating with them all, looking for ways to ensure we work together effectively in ways which are mutually beneficial. It has been reassuring to hear their recognition and respect for the significant part we play in the success of Golf, and I’d like to thank them all on behalf of the Association for their co-operation and support.

I’d also like to sincerely thank the team here at Elmwood who have been un unstinting in their support during the year ensuring that my time spent on BIGGA matters has not resulted in a diminution of quality at my own facility.

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Happy New Year everybody. Those of us lucky enough to be in employment and returning to work after the festive break, will no doubt face ongoing difficult times as the UK economy still seems to be stuck in a deep economic rout. We hear more and more golf clubs are struggling to stay afloat and some radical measures are having to be taken to keep the business going.

The GTG sincerely hopes that employers look to maintain and improve the standards offered at their clubs by investing in staff development.

At the majority of golf clubs, certainly in Europe, a small team of multi-skilled operators, led by a qualified competent Course Manager has managed to work its way through previous recessions (showing my age now!).

The British greenkeeper education and training system supports those employers willing to invest in staff skills with Government funding being available through the Apprenticeship Scheme and other funding initiatives.

The Scottish and Welsh Governments have introduced schemes to support clubs in considering recruiting new apprentices and more recently the UK Government has proposed a Youth Contract, which again is designed to give employers funding to support the employment of apprentices.

Scotland has Employer Recruitment Incentives and Flexible Training Options available and while it is often difficult to keep track of new initiatives such as these and they are often subject to change at short notice we do encourage employers to contact their Quality Assured Centres for the most up to date information.

Greenkeepers themselves can also apply for funding for Scholarships and Bursaries available through organisations such as BIGGA and The R&A as well as individual funding initiatives such as the LTA in Scotland. I hear more and more stories of professionalism by Course Managers when developing their course maintenance and development budgets for their employer to consider.

"Making the case" for new equipment, materials and staff isn’t always easy at the best of times but all of these skills can be gained through training and a well presented case can engage an employer especially when they see the projected benefits from the proposals.

While we would always prefer golf club employers to recruit sufficiently full time staff to maintain and manage the golf course to the highest possible standards we also have a tradition of using part-time and volunteers to do the Course Manager’s job.

The standards now expected at the majority of golf clubs are at a level which demands on both employers and their employees have never been greater.

Why have standards been set so high? Clearly golf courses chosen for the televised tournaments ensure adequate resources are provided for their staff to present excellent playing surfaces for the leading golfers in the world to show off their skills, but without knowledgeable and skilled greenkeepers, the game at all levels would undoubtedly suffer.

The GTG has maintained a career structure which can be used for apprentice greenkeepers to progress but also provides for other person employed or volunteering to play their part on and off the golf course.

I know many of today’s top Course Managers have had to learn so many skills far beyond the apprenticeship and together, with helpful comments from these Course Managers who have stepped up to becoming General Managers, we must now ensure our Quality Assured Centres and the Training Providers support the next generation, with quality education and training schemes aligned to the National Occupational Standards recently agreed for the sector.

How can we ensure these training courses are available? The National Occupational Standards cover craft, supervisory and management skills and the knowledge required and are written in a format which can be transferred into short training courses or full qualifications.

The GTG promotes both formal and informal education and training for both greenkeepers and golf club employers.

The National Occupational Standards are sometimes better explained as UNITS and all can be delivered through training courses but to date are mainly used to cluster Units together to make up vocational and college based qualifications.

So whether you are an apprentice, assistant or deputy greenkeeper, Course Manager, volunteer or Chairman of Green, the GTG can assist you to have a meaningful contribution to supporting your golf club business aspirations.

The GTG Quality Assured Centres are available to assist employers access across all of the new Government funding from Apprenticeships, Youth Contracts to other schemes as they become available to assist trainees develop their skills and knowledge and for employers to employ “more hands”.

We check out the National Occupational Standards and the GTG’s Quality Assured Centres and Training Provider network on the GTG’s website www.the-gtg.co.uk.

Happy New Year! I can’t believe another year has passed - where did 2011 go? Rachael and I wish you all health, wealth and happiness for 2012.

The focus this month is firmly on Harrogate Week and specifically, for the L&D department, the Continue to Learn education programme.

Continue to Learn at Harrogate Week

Harrogate Week kicks off the year in grand style with the Continue to Learn education programme running from Sunday 22 to Thursday 26 January. For those of you that haven’t booked yet fear not, you can book up to Wednesday 11 January 2012.

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To view our full programme visit www.gtgevents.co.uk and book now.

Thursday 26 January
Experiences of the Ohio State Laboratory Internship Programme

The Biology and Effects of Para- sitic Nematodes in Sports Turf

Tuesday 24 January

The Showfloor Theatre, located next to the BIGGA Stand, will be unveiled for the first time. Presentations and Awards will take place at the Showfloor Theatre, attendance is free of charge and open to all attendees. I hope you will take the time to attend some of the events that are taking place:

Tuesday 24 January
Edwin Budding Award

Sustainability Efforts Easier, More Practical Interview Skills for Greenkeepers Scholarship

How to Write Your CV and Prepare a Cover Letter

Presentation of CPD Diplomas and Master Greenkeeper Certificates

Experiences of the Ohio State Internship Programme

Multifunctional Golf Courses – Making the Case for New Equipment

Pesticides Updates

The Ultimate Renovation Package – What’s Most Important?

Understanding Cutting Units

Chemical Management of Golf Course Pesticides

Perceptions in Greens Management – Is This Most Important? You Decide

Tier 4 – How Will It Affect You?

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Achieving Smooth Golf Greens Being a Professional and Living It

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**GI INDUSTRY UPDATE**

The latest turf industry news from around the globe

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**John Deere Enhances European Parts Service**

John Deere’s European Parts Distribution Centre has inaugurated its new deconsolidation and packaging facility, a €2.3 million investment, which will create additional employment for around 90 people.

The new operation was established within just ten months and will help streamline parts logistics and further enhance the supply of parts to John Deere dealers and customers throughout Europe, the CIS, Northern Africa and the Near and Middle East (EAME).

“In light of the rapidly growing range of John Deere machines in all equipment divisions, we must continue to improve our supply of parts and merchandise,” said Fritz Rhiemdorf, Director Parts Operations. The new 16,000 square metre deconsolidation and packaging complex in Bruchsal will serve as a hub for incoming parts, which will either complement outgoing parts shipments or be forwarded to storage areas at E-PDC.

Due to logistics and handling improvements, the company expects to reduce delivery times even further, especially in peak harvesting seasons. The Bruchsal E-PDC currently stores more than 200,000 part numbers in a 62,000 square meter area.

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**Double Promotion**

Bolans has promoted Jonathan Hill to Sales and Marketing Director and Emily Kirkland to Customer Service Manager. Jonathan was previously National Sales Manager, has been with the company for over eight years. Jonathan’s appointment as a Director is a key step in achieving the demanding objectives we have set as a company. We are all enthusiastic about the way the company is developing in these challenging times and Jonathan’s experience and enthusiasm will be invaluable in achieving our objectives,” said Paul Dawson, MD.

Emily worked as both a Sales Administrator and Customer Services Co-ordinator.

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**Inturf Fullfills Green Promise**

In 2009 Inturf signed up to 10:10 to signal about climate change. The business aimed to cut its use of energy by working more efficiently and as a result has cut its carbon emissions in the process. In fact, through dramatically reducing its use of electricity, heating oil and diesel Inturf has cut emissions by 18% in the first year.

“We’ve taken a good look at how we use energy in every part of the business,” says Alex Edwards, Joint MD. “Every stage of turf production from sowing to harvesting has been made more efficient. We’ve redesigned our delivery systems too so that has – a substantial part of our costs - has been greatly reduced,”

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**Lone Britannia**

Ecoast Turfcare was the only British exhibitor at GreenExpo, held in Bordeaux in November 2011. Operator of the Drill n Fill/Deep Drill aerators and sports turf maintenance and renovation systems, Ecoast has just returned from a highly successful visit to the French Greenkeepers’ Association exhibition, taking place over three days at the city’s lakeside venue.

Ecoast MD, Benyon King was impressed by the quality of the visitors. “We’ve seen increasing numbers of European golf clubs booking us for Drill in Fill contract work and machine sales over the past few years,” he said, “so a personal presence on the Continent was a no-brainer.”

“We had a lot of interest in Drill in Fill from the major clubs, some of whom made definite bookings and there was evidence that smaller clubs were co-operating to book the system between them. In addition it was great to meet several satisfied customers, from management to greenkeeping staff.”

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**TURFCO iPAD WINNER**

Graeme Lorimer, Course Manager at Bishopbriggs Golf Club on the north eastern outskirts of Glasgow, has won one of the six Apple iPads offered as prizes in Turfco’s promotional campaign celebrating 50 years of topdressing.

Turfco, the Minnesota-based manufacturer and inventor of the first mechanised topdresser have been running the competition since the February 2011.

At the end of the year, a Grand Prize draw will be held with the winner receiving a Turfco WideSpin 1540 EC topdresser.

Graeme was presented with his prize by John Quinton, Ransomes Jacobsen UK and Ireland sales manager, during a visit to IGW ScotLawn early in November. “I can’t believe it; I’m not normally very lucky when I enter competitions, so when I was notified that I’d won, I was absolutely astounded,” said Graeme.

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**What’s your number?**

Our regular and random profile of an industry figure continues with this month’s lucky number...

**Name:** John Coleman
**Company:** Advanced Turf Technology
**Position:** Owner

**How long have you been in the industry?**
24 Years

**How did you get into it?**
I was a fairly keen golfer as a junior and thought that getting a job as a greenkeeper, because of the early starts, would allow me to play golf after work. After the first week however I thought my legs were about to fall off with all the walking I was doing! You could say Frank Scullion, my first boss, saved me the ignominy of many a frustrating Saturday medal. Thanks Frank!

**What other jobs have you done?**
At the moment I’m almost exclusively working at ATT but in the past I’ve spent a lot of time with golf course construction, primarily with RTJ II in Scandinavia, although I still do some advisory work.

**What do you like about your current job?**
I enjoy the challenge of bringing new concepts through to actual usable products.

**What changes have you seen in the industry?**
In many ways the fundamentals of decent greenkeeping have stayed pretty much the same. There have been some significant improvements in the arsenal of chemicals that are now available such as PGR’s. The biggest change that I can see is golf itself. It appears that there are significantly fewer golfers and too many courses vying for the same business. I believe, it will end up with more management companies running multiple courses to lessen overheads.

**What do you like to do in your spare time?**
I try and take part in a few triathlons in a season and also a few open water swimming events of about a couple of miles in length. I enjoy a nice bottle of wine of course so it’s not all nut case stuff!!

**Where do you see yourself in 10 years time?**
That’s an interesting question in these times of uncertainty. I’d like to have a sound solvent business obviously. I’m also hoping my knees hold out so I can keep on with the nut case stuff!

**Who do you consider best friends in the industry?**
With 24 Years in the business I’m lucky to have a lot of good friends. For fear of leaving anybody out I’ll limit my list to one very good friend, Iain MacPherson.

**What’s your lucky number?**
8
GI

INDUSTRY UPDATE

The latest turf industry news from around the globe

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November 2011

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During the visit to the French Greenkeepers’ Association exhibition, taking place over three days at the city’s lakeside venue. EcoSol MD, Bretton King was impressed by the quality of the visitors. “We’ve seen increasing numbers of European golf clubs booking us for Drill n Fill contract work and machine sales over the past few years,” he said.

“Every stage of turf production from sowing to harvesting has been perfectly summed up by Emily’s promotion. We are delighted that an excellent work ethic is a key part in achieving our objectives,” said Paul Dawson, MD.

Emily worked as both a Sales Administrator and Customer Services Co-ordinator.

John Deere’s European Parts Distribution Centre

TURFCO iPad WINNER

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The business aimed to cut its use of energy by working more efficiently and so achieve a 10% cut in its carbon emissions in the process.

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InDUStry UpDate

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Moving on up

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When Harrogate Golf Club’s Head Greenkeeper announced his intention to retire, the club started the process of looking for a successor. They advertised widely and pulled together a strong short list of candidates who were then put through an arduous interview process.

The club was delighted with the final decision, they had appointed a man with vast experience with a vision to take the course forward.

That man was Paul Mitchell, who had been attending BIGGA training courses over a number of years and felt ready to take the step up to be Head man.

“It felt less of daunting prospect than when I became Deputy, because then there were guys on the team much older than me, who had been on the club for a long time, and I had to issue them with orders. “Over the last four or five years I had had a major input on the projects we were doing, as well as in the day to day running of the course, so it wasn’t so much of a jump when I got the job.”

The first task Paul and the team tackled after he had been appointed was the bunker drainage. “As with most clubs there was a complaint about the bunkers holding water. If new drainage was needed we put that in, as well as some upside down turf because stones were coming up through the clay.”

Paul Mitchell

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When Harrogate Golf Club’s Head Greenkeeper announced his intention to retire, the club started the process of looking for a successor. They advertised widely and pulled together a strong short list of candidates who were then put through an arduous interview process.

The club was delighted with the final decision, they had appointed a man with vast experience with a vision to take the course forward.

That man was Paul Mitchell, but there was no need for a long induction programme, or introductions to the rest of the staff, as Paul had been a member of the club since 1972 and been Deputy Head Greenkeeper since 1985.

“I was really pleased that the club went through the interview process and that I wasn’t just handed the job,” explained Paul, who was 50 when he took up the post.

“During the interview I highlighted some of the issues – woodland management, ryegrass on the greens, bunker drainage and a thatch problem and explained what I would do to resolve it. I was also told at the time that the aim was to produce a higher quality golf course, but with a reduced budget and I was to operated with one member of staff fewer than before.”

Paul had been attending BIGGA training courses over a number of years and felt ready to take the step up to be Head man.

“It felt less of daunting prospect than when I became Deputy, because then there were guys on the team much older than me, who had been at the club for a long time, and I had to issue them with orders.

“Over the last four or five years I had had a major input on the projects we were doing, as well as in the day to day running of the course, so it wasn’t so much of a jump when I got the job.”

The first task Paul and the team tackled after he had been appointed was the bunker drainage.

“As with most clubs there was a complaint about the bunkers holding water. If new drainage was needed we put that in, as well as some upside down turf because stones were coming up through the clay.

“With most clubs there was a complaint about the bunkers, and the fact that they were holding water. We checked them all, and if new drainage was needed we put that in, as well as some upside down turf because we had a problem with stones coming up through the clay. Some of the members thought we bought sand with the stones already in it,” joked Paul.

“We completed four holes in that first month which showed everyone what we were capable of,” he said, adding that they also cleared some scrubland at the back of the 16th which opened the view up to the next hole.

“Straight away I heard people commenting on the fact that they could see Green staff working out the course. I’ve always wanted to finish any job we start, because there is nothing worse than a guy who plays on a Saturday morning coming back the following Saturday and not seeing any obvious progress having been made.”

Having made his initial splash, Paul and his team of four set about improving the greens.

“We’d had a ryegrass problem in the greens for many years, while there was also an organic matter issue,” he explained.

“I did some research on Rescue, reading about it and going on BIGGA’s Bulletin Boards and decided to do a trial on our 4th, which is just beside our sheds. That proved successful and following discussions with Simon Watson, of Syngenta; Simon Hardcastle, of Scotts; our agronomist, Henry Bechelet, and another local Course Manager, who’d carried out the same work the year before, we agree that we should go ahead. The feeling was that if we didn’t do it now all we’d achieve is putting it off for another year.”

To aid accuracy Paul borrowed a pedestrian sprayer, worked out that he needed 25 litres for 500 square metres and carried out tests on two greens using pure water. Confident that he was applying at the correct rate, and happy in his own mind with the approach, he sprayed all 18 greens, the extra greens which is used in the winter, and the putting green.

“At first I didn’t think anything was going to happen but then it kicked in and it has done a great job and it has got rid of 90% of the ryegrass. I’ll look to do it again next September,” said Paul, who made sure the membership was kept informed of what was going to happen through the Green News which he introduced and the noticeboard.

Paul has also been using Primo Maxx on tees and greens and has been delighted with the results.

“We often have club matches in the evening and the player asked us to double cut as they were not playing until 5pm and the greens were a little slower but the Primo has meant that single cutting has been sufficient, again reducing the amount of hours required.

“The organic matter issue had been something Paul had been aware of for some time – he could smell it – and he had holver tuned three times in the space of seven months but, by his own admission, got rid of 5% of the problem at best.”

“Henry had it analysed and found that the problem was in the...
Paul had changed the top dressing from a fine grain to a medium and the Graden’s ability to insert this straight into the soil profile was another plus.

Prior to hiring the Graden in from Kensett Sport, Paul enrolled half a dozen members – including his brother-in-law – to help with the filling of the hopper.

“The whole process took two days including doing the 3rd green twice as it was particularly soft. It was extremely hard work but fortunately the members know me and were prepared to help. We vertidrained and pencil tined ahead of the Graden pass and it took an hour to do each green and followed up with a core harvester and drag matted each green three times. We put temporary greens in place but within two hours the greens were back in play.”

And the work has paid off.

“The members have been saying that they have never seen the greens so good. Ideally we should do them again but that will come down to whether the club can afford it,” explained Paul, who is also a three time Club Champion.

The club is currently waiting on a report carried out by architect, Jonathan Gaunt, specifically on bunker redesign, but also with a broader remit of creating a template for the next five to 10 years.

“I said in the Course Policy Document that we should only carry out alterations to the golf course if we bring in a professional architect. Jonathan was here all day and was very positive about some of the things we’ve done here. I’m looking forward to reading his document.”

Paul has been delighted with the support he’s had since taking over as Head man.

“I would like to thank Green Chairman, Neil Ormondroyd, the club Council and the members for their encouragement and positive comments since I became Head Greenkeeper. I’d also express my thanks to the rest of the Greenkeeping staff whose efforts I greatly appreciate,” said Paul, who added that his daughter, Tori, had helped out by working 15 hours a week in the summer and a day a week during the autumn and winter.

Paul has been a BIGGA member since day one of the Association and has taken full advantage of what the Association has to offer.

“I’ve attended Management Courses and did the Design course at Harrogate about four years ago while, as I’ve said, I find the Bulletin Boards a great source of information. I posted about a soil moisture meter recently and got over 1000 views and 15 replies which I thought was really good.”

“I also contacted Paul Worster about staff appraisals through the Forum and he very kindly sent me some information. It’s very rare that I contribute but I do read it a lot.”

While many people travel thousands of miles to attend BTME and the Continue to Learn Programme Paul has it much easier. He lives a 10 minute walk away and can always return to his own bed at night.

“The seminars and workshops are excellent and I enjoy nipping into see some of the free ones. The half hour ones can be very good, I’ll take the lads for a curry and meet up with people there. You can learn so much just by sitting in a pub having a few beers.”

“It comes at a good time of the year and it’s the ideal place for it.”

Paul may have had to wait to step up to Head man at Harrogate but he is making sure he makes the most of the opportunity.