Thomas’s travels

I felt very nervous as I sat on the plane about to fly out to the States. On arrival I found myself waiting at a very cold bus stop, when a large pick-up truck pulled out of the hotel car park and the driver leaned out and offered me a lift - a big thank you to Mike Prescott from turf contractor Sportscape for that.

At first it felt strange to be back in a classroom, taking notes and revising for tests at the University of Massachusetts Amherst (UMASS). The college day consisted of two-hour lessons from 8am–5pm with subjects including Entomology, Pathology, Turf Management and Soil Science. I enjoyed listening to some very interesting guest speakers such as Bill Spence, Superintendent at the Boston Country Club which held the 1999 Ryder Cup.

I expected the American way of doing things would be totally different to ours, and in ways they are, maybe less environmentally friendly, but the biggest hurdle was learning the different grass names for the cool seasons grasses. The lessons were very informative covering topics new to me. Networking with the other students on the course was priceless – I discussed the different techniques they use as well as how their courses are run.

As a part of my prize I was lucky enough to attend the GCSCA golf show in San Diego, I would be travelling there with Dave Canterbury - the Australian Toro winner. Unfortunately our flight to Chicago was delayed, and with only 40 minutes between flights I could see it was going to be tight. Firstly we headed in the wrong direction through the huge airport, but after a rushed chat with an official we turned around and ran back the way we came, just making the flight and collapsing back into our seats.

San Diego was like landing in a different country – it was warm and sunny with palm trees. That evening I attended the opening ceremony, with some very interesting speakers. After this I joined my tutor Jonathan Knowles for some dinner and explored a few bars around the Gaslamp Quarter. The show itself was very interesting, with lots of products that are rarely used in the UK, including big fans to improve air circulation. It was great to catch up with people I already knew but I also made new friends. I also managed to make time for a tour of the USS Midway Aircraft Carrier which was very interesting.

I knew the trip home was also going to be eventful when I discovered storm Nemo was forecast to dump three feet of snow on the east coast. Even though my flight from Philadelphia to Hartford was cancelled, I decided to take the flight to Philadelphia. On arrival I was informed that there would be no flights for two days which created a weekend in Philadelphia for me, and what a beautiful city it is. I then headed to Washington.

We began by visiting some of the local bars and restaurants and had some great nights out at basketball and hockey games. I was lucky enough to watch UMASS beat the number one seeds Boston College 5-1. It was a great atmosphere.

Unfortunately my trip to Boston got cancelled due to the snow, but the final leg of my trip went ahead - a visit to the Toro factories in Minneapolis. This was an amazing tour full of information about Toro as an employer as well as the products they produce. Standing at the start of the production line was very cool, as you looked down the line a shell turned into a mower. I was now sad that the end of the trip was near.

I would like to thank Toro, Lely and BHGGA for organising this award, as it gives an amazing opportunity for aspiring greenkeepers to progress their knowledge and careers. I had a fantastic time in America, making some lifelong friendships along the way, and these people made the trip so much fun.

It truly was a once in a lifetime experience, and I wish I could start it over again. I would strongly recommend to any enthusiastic greenkeeper who wants to stand out from the crowd and study at a highly recommended University to consider the Toro award.

I will never forget the experience that I had at UMASS and the people I met there.
Open Support Team Q&A

The chance to be a member of the BIGGA Open Support Team is one of the many benefits of BIGGA membership. If you were lucky enough to have been chosen, what can you expect at Muirfield in July?

The BIGGA Open Support Team members are an important part of the behind the scenes unit at one of the world’s greatest sporting events. It offers members the chance to follow in the footsteps of legendary golfers and learn from the greenkeeping teams at the UK’s top golfing venues – another real benefit of BIGGA membership.

We’ve had several queries over the years about the way the Team is formed and the various roles they perform at the Open Championship – so here’s BIGGA’s General Manager Tracey Maddison to answer your questions.

Q) How many BIGGA members applied to join The Open Support Team 2013?
A) We received over 100 applications with a wide range of ages, experience and geographical locations. We had applications from as far afield as Ireland, Sweden, Vietnam, Australia, USA and Germany.

Q) What process do you follow to select the Team?
A) It is quite a scientific process! We ensure that there is a core of people who have Open Championship experience in the Team to act as mentors for those who are involved for the first time.

Over the years the responsibilities of the Team have increased and the RA’s and the host club are keen that there are some experienced heads in the key roles during the week. As part of the process there is a guarantee that a certain number of first time applicants are selected as well as a good number of members who are engaged with BIGGA at Section level or through CPD. The Team are split into five groups or ‘pods’ with each having a Pod Leader who has good prior experience of the event. Each pod remain together for transport etc throughout the week, and generate a real camaraderie.

Q) What do the Support Team do?
A) There are a lot of early mornings! We have a team on the course from 4am every day from the Tuesday through to the Sunday, preparing the golf course alongside the home greenkeeping team – particularly the bunkers – for the day’s play. We then send out a member with each match to rake every single bunker and deal with the water in bunkers. When you think of the millions of people across the world tuning in just a few hours later, you appreciate how important this job is. It goes out, but sometimes they can still be working on the course after 9pm.

The evening before each day’s play we have a random draw to decide who joins which group of players – so there’s real excitement as nobody knows if they are going to join a quiet early morning round or follow the champion up the final fairway. It’s fair to say that everybody is absolutely exhausted by Sunday, but the adrenaline and excitement keeps everyone going.

Q) How important is their role?
A) We’ve supported the existing greenkeeping teams at Open Championships since 1984 now, and the team’s responsibility is increasing all the time.

We received a terrific letter from Paul Smith, Head Greenkeeper at Royal Lytham & St Annes Golf Club, after last year’s event saying how vital the team’s work is. Paul also came into the BIGGA marquee on the Sunday to personally thank the whole team.

BTME 2013 at Harrogate saw the Baroness stand busy over all three days with the LM315 being a real focus of attention for all visitors!

More than 100 years of experience goes into the making of Baroness products, giving unrivalled cutting quality and the very lowest running costs.

For more than 20 years Baroness has been building the LM315 with our very own ‘hybrid’ drive system which minimises the amount of hydraulic lines by using cable drive to the cutting units.
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The evening before each day’s play we go out, but sometimes they can still be working on the course after 9pm. The Team are also on hand to deal with whatever the weather throws at us. Last year an enormous amount of rain fell unexpectedly during the Thursday night, so we got a bunch of extra guys out of their beds at 6am on the Friday to go and deal with the water in bunkers. When you think of the millions of people across the world tuning in just a few hours later, you appreciate how important this job is. Also, I think it’s a huge educational opportunity. No matter where in the country or what course the members of the Support Team are from, they will always learn something – a new technique or a way of approaching a problem – from the greenkeeping team working at The Open venue itself and from their fellow Team members, and that can only help their daily work and future career.

Q) How important is their role?
We’ve supported the existing greenkeeping teams at Open Championships since 1984 now, and the team’s responsibility is increasing all the time. We received a terrific letter from Paul Smith, Head Greenkeeper at Royal Lytham & St Annes Golf Club, after last year’s event saying how vital the team’s work is. Paul also came into the BIGGA marquee on the Sunday to personally thank the whole team. He said how vital the Open Support Team are from, they will always learn something – a new technique or a way of approaching a problem – from the greenkeeping team working at The Open venue itself and from their fellow Team members, and that can only help their daily work and future career.

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Two runners-up will receive an unframed print, and the final 12 will all be featured in next year’s calendar.

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Tractor powered vacuum, sweeper and flail mower/scarifying collectors cover a broad equipment base. Choosing the right machine to collect everything from leaves and litter through to clippings and even cores can be tricky. Here’s James de Haviland with key advice.

VACUUM SWeePER CoLLeCtorS

Suck it and see

Although there are potentially a large number of tractor powered collectors to choose from, homing in upon what you actually want the machine to do makes selecting the right tool for the job easier.

Some models are designed more for hard surface work and do not have the necessary clearances within the machine to cope with large bulky materials such as leaves and grass clippings. Others have a hopper capacity that is suited more to dense ‘road’ type sweepings than bulky organic matter.

Firstly a bit of a shortcut taking in the main machine types. These fall into two basic types - vacuum with or without a powered brush or ball systems and units with just brushes or flails. The most popular self-contained vacuum collectors include the Trilo models from the Grass Group. For golf courses, the company’s Trilo S4 now ranks as the top seller. At the heart of the S4 is the 850mm diameter turbine that provides the suction. It is designed to have enough power to draw even heavy debris into the 4m³ hopper. The main suction head has a working width of 1.80m and is complemented by a 5.0m long 250mm diameter wonder hose.

When considering the purchase of this type of model, it is important to match the machine to its intended application.

For the most part, vacuum suction alone is perfectly adequate to collect grass clippings and leaves but you may want to consider a model that can be used to also carry our scarifying work or have a powered brush.

Moving on to tractor powered sweeper/flail collectors, there are a several makes and models to choose from, but they are sometimes hard to identify due to the emphasis that can be placed upon what they do. A good example is the Redexim Charterhouse Turf Tidy models. These versatile machines are sold as a de-thatcher and scarifier that collects debris as it works, as opposed to emphasis being placed on their abilities as a collector.

Offered with a choice of 1.50 or 1.80m working widths, the Turf Tidy 1310 and 1710 machines are supplied with multi-function scarifier heads with blades spaced at 18mm.

These can be user swapped for flails or a sweeper with four brush elements. Duties can include mowing, leaf collection or hard surface sweeping. Fitted with 2.50 and 3.00m³ high tip collector bodies, Turf Tidy units are designed for tractors of 25hp when just sweeping, 40hp being recommended for work with flails.

Another versatile machine is the Wessex ProLine STC flail collector. Fitted with a large diameter steel drum rotor with four rows of flails and two rows of draft paddles, it is designed to create suction for collecting the grass as it cuts or dealing with other debris, even in the wet. Offered in 1.2m and 1.7m working widths, the ProLine STC is semi-mounted to the tractor but runs on its own four wheels in work.

The Litamina HT from SISIS comes in 1.2m and 1.5m working widths and are offered with the choice of a screen hopper bottom, enabling sand or top dressings to fall back onto the swept surface whilst retaining debris such as leaves. This sort of unit is useful when brushing in top dressing materials but also taking out debris such as leaves.

Wiedenmann UK collectors include the Super 500 and Super 600. These have respective hopper capacities of 2.5m³ and a significant 4.5m³. Again, these units combine a flail mower, scarifier and sweeper in one unit. To help reduce ground pressure, the Super 600 runs on four 23x10.5 pneumatic tyres. The hopper lifts via a parallel system so the hopper rotates to...
Tractor powered vacuum, sweeper and flail mower/scarifying collectors cover a broad equipment base. Choosing the right machine to collect everything from leaves and litter through to clippings and even cores can be tricky. Here’s James de Haviland with key advice.

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The Litamina HT from SISIS has a 4.5m³ hopper capacity. The latest Super 600 from Wiedenmann combines a flail mower, scarifier and swather in one unit. As with other similar design, the action of the flails creates a vacuum to allow the collection and shredding of bulk material such as leaves.

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Terraboro’s ProLine STC flail collector. Fitted with a large diameter steel drum rotor with four rows of flails and two rows of draft paddles, the Terraboro ProLine STC flail collector is designed to create suction for collecting the grass as it cuts or dealing with other debris, even in the wet. Offered in 1.2m and 1.8m working widths, the ProLine STC is semi-mounted to the tractor but runs on its own four wheels in work.

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These can be user swapped for other debris, even in the wet. Offered in 1.2m and 1.8m working widths, the ProLine STC is semi-mounted to the tractor but runs on its own four wheels in work. The front wheels are repositioned by a simple pin mechanism to adjust the working height. Applications will include cutting and collecting golf course roughs through to verticutting when the interchangeable knives are fitted. The same unit can also be used to run with just a brush rotor.

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VACUUM SWEEPER COLLECTORS
The Imants RotoSweep from Campey Turfcare Systems is purpose designed to remove surface debris from fine turf, to include cores, grass clippings, leaves and general litter. The dual powered brush is claimed to cope with heavy debris and operate in less than ideal working conditions.

The essential workings of the Amazone Groundkeeper is much the same between the various models, the inclusion of two rows of paddles creating enough draft to lift and shift heavy and wet leaves. The flail rotor can accommodate a choice of Vial and either 2mm or 4mm thick scarifying blades. All the blade types simply slot into place without the need for tools.

The Super 600 attaches via a draw bar to tractors 50hp and above. Options include rear lights, a front roller to help reduce the chances of scalping, a dethatching unit helping to 'windrow' debris and operate in less than ideal working conditions. A demonstration of the machines should choose itself.

Campey Turfcare Systems have started to see increased interest in their Imants RotoSweep. Designed to remove surface debris from fine turf, the machine can collect cores, grass clippings, leaves and general litter. The RotoSweep features a dual powered brush system that is designed to enable it to cope with heavy debris and allow operation in less than ideal working conditions. Tractor towed and PTO powered, the RotoSweep has a hydraulic tip-up, easy to remove or replace for transporting. Units that collect with flails will require encouraging material such as leaves, so helping to maximising hopper capacity. Vacuum and brush collectors are a popular option today.

How do you choose?
The models detailed are not intended to provide a definitive list of what is available, but they do give an idea of not only what’s on offer but also how the machines differ. Choosing the right machine is easier if you can set out clear priorities before buying. Different circumstances will impact upon performance too, word of mouth recommendations needing to be put into the context of individual machine usage.

A demonstration of the machines is well worth the effort. It’s no good selecting a machine to clear under trees if it proves too tall. It is also worth looking at a blower to complement this type of equipment, these units helping to ‘windrow’ debris for faster collection. Other points to consider are:

- Weight
- Standard and available tyre sizes
- Versatility
- Material capacity
- Power requirements
- Physical size
- Discharge heights
- Available options
- Main duties

One final point. This is not a buyer’s guide and does not list every sweeper collector on the market. Further, many rotary ride-on tractor mowers can be fitted with a vacuum collector that will also enable leaves to be cleared without investing in a different machine. You may also consider a mulching deck for this type of work. The key is to establish what you need to clear and collect, how the debris is subsequently handled and if you are looking to also work on hard surfaces. Understand what your priorities are and the right machine should choose itself.

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NEW
help improve emptying. As with other similar design, the action of the flails creates a vacuum to allow the collection and shredding of bulk material such as leaves.

The Super 600 attaches via a draw bar to tractors 50hp and above. Options include rear lights, a front roller to help reduce the chances of scalping, a dethatching unit helping to ‘windrow’ debris and operate in less than ideal working conditions.

The Super 600 can accommodate a 2.5m³ hopper. The dual powered brush is claimed to cope with heavy debris and operate in less than ideal working conditions.

The essential workings of the Imants RotoSweep is much the same as the various models of this type of equipment, these units helping to ‘windrow’ debris. All the blade types simply slot into place without the need for tools.

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The message on the grapevine is that oak processionary moth (OPM) could at last be controlled by aerial spraying in the UK. After five years of dithering, the UK Plant Health Authorities appear to be learning a lesson, taking the lead from their counterparts in Germany and trialling aerial application of insecticide against OPM.

OPM (Thaumetopoea processionea) is moving mainly westwards and southwards from its initial twin infestation focus on oak trees imported from the Netherlands and planted in the London Boroughs of Richmond and Ealing during 2005/2006. A total of nine contiguous London Boroughs – Richmond, Ealing, Hounslow, Brent, Ham- mershurst and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea, Kingston, Merton and Wandsworth are now affected by this main infestation. Last summer the infestation leapfrogged the Thames from its southern front at Hampton Court and into the Elmbridge area of North Surrey.

Two ongoing ‘satellite’ infestations, originating from later separate introductions of OPM on oak trees also imported from the Netherlands, are in the Pangbourne area of West Berkshire and the West Wickham area of the London Borough of Bromley. This latest infestation has spilled over into the neighbouring London Borough of Croydon.

Aerial spraying is not something done on the hoof with pilots leaping into cockpits wearing ten-gallon hats and shouting ‘chose away!’ It requires thorough planning and regulatory hoops to be jumped, especially since nearly all OPM affected oak trees in the UK are in urban and suburban areas.

Any aerial spraying undertaken will be carried out using helicopters to apply the biological insecticide Bacillus thuringiensis subsp. kurstaki (BT). Aerial spraying experts will carefully consider and calculate a comprehensive range of spray and formulation factors and parameters. These will include aircraft speed, height above the target, nature and concentration of the liquid formulation used, mean droplet diameter and droplet size distribution, spray volume and insecticide dose sprayed per unit area, as well as wind speed and wind direction on the day.

**Biological perspectives**

In addition, there will be key biological factors and requirements, related to OPM larva behaviour and the canopy characteristics of oak trees, that must be understood and satisfied if the programme is going to work, irrespective of how nominally accurate aerial application might be.

Spray timing is crucially important for several reasons. BT kills OPM larvae via ingestion and stomach action through larval feeding on the foliage. Consequently the target for spray droplets is the new oak leaves produced in spring, usually appearing from mid-April onwards with OPM larvae hatching sometime during the second half of April.

The twin synchronised starting points are therefore timing of oak tree re-foliation and hatching of the L3 (first instar) larvae from plaques of insect eggs on small branches at the top of the canopy. Both are dependent on temperature. An early spring with higher than normal temperature should realistically see earlier synchronised oak tree re-foliation and larval hatch, and vice versa.

Next thing to be established is when the larvae start to feed on bursting buds, young leaves and flowers. Is it immediately after hatching or sometime thereafter? If a contact insecticide is used spray operators would additionally benefit from knowing when larvae are most exposed to spray droplets by being, for instance, on the upper (adaxial) surface of oak leaves. Synchronisation of aerial application with start of larval feeding is vital for another very important reason. Youngest small larvae (L1, L2 and early stage L3) are the easiest to kill with insecticide. The lower the larval body mass then a correspondingly lower dose of active insecticide ingredient is required to kill the larvae.

Secondly this is the only time during the entire juvenile insect stage period that larval feeding will be permanently feeding on foliage in the outer shell of foliage at the top of the oak tree canopy where the bulk of spray droplets from aerial application will be deposited. Once larvae have successfully passed through the L3 (third instar) stage they are much bigger and harder with correspondingly higher doses of insecticide required to achieve mortality.

OPM larvae in the late L3 to L6 stages spend progressively more time during the day on the trunk and main scaffold branches and increasingly in their silken nests. As such they are less likely to be feeding in on the outer canopy shell at the tops of trees where BT depos-