Even on a wet and windswept autumnal morning, the setting for Royal St David's Golf Club in Harlech, north west Wales, was breathtaking. It's a remarkable location – an SSSI within Snowdonia National Park. Harlech Castle loomed high above while Snowdonia itself flowered impressively from the north.

Roger Kerry has been Head Greenkeeper at the links for over 30 years, and his twin brother John has been Deputy for almost as long. My visit meant I would be able to examine the club's past, present and future because they had already hired Roger's replacement to join the team - Rhys Butler, former Deputy Head Greenkeeper at Aberdovey, a similar links 40 miles along the Welsh coast.

As I negotiated the small level crossing which runs yards from the club’s maintenance facility, I was immediately warmly welcomed by the twins, who revealed they will retire on different days! John has been at Harlech since 1948, but Roger joined as Deputy in 1980.

Roger continued: “The greens were so boggy even in summer. You would hit a shot onto the 17th green and it would plug in the turf! You had 95% meadowgrass with two inches of thatch. The club wouldn't invest. It had a very good name in the forties, but it was being run in the past and it wasn't anywhere near the standard anyone wanted – the club, golfers or the greenkeepers. There was no structure, no long-term plan.”

One of their first moves was to invite Jim Arthur to the course. With no formal education available, they avidly read his books and articles and knew they had to invite him to Wales – but the club needed convincing his visit was necessary.

Roger said: “The club were concerned that the knowledge Jim would pass on to the team would lead to them demanding higher wages. That was the mentality then. Eventually he came and it was a real eye opener, exactly as he'd read in his articles. He gave us all sorts of advice and pointers.”

John added: “Of course, at that time we didn’t have vertidrainers or slotted, so it was a case of hand forking the greens. We gradually got them fitter, so you could play the running game.”

“We gradually made progress, maintaining drier and drier surfaces. In drought conditions in the late eighties we decided to let the course burn out for its long-term benefit. Maybe we went over the top occasionally, but we were still learning. Sometimes you have to stoop to conquer.”

Gradually, golfers started to return with low handicappers enjoying this truly natural links test of golf all year round. In turn, this attracted tournaments. During my visit, the PGA Welsh National Championship was in town, and they've also regularly hosted the Ladies European Tour and the R&A-backed Jacques Leglise Trophy between GB & Ireland’s ‘boys’ team and their European counterparts this year won by GB & Ireland. Naturally, this increased focus and acclaim did present its own challenges.

Roger explained: “We realised a few years ago that the practice ground was too small. Better players with more modern equipment were clearing the ground and landing balls on the 17th fairway. So we moved the 17th fairway further left, making it a tougher hole and extending the practice ground. For the same reason we've also moved some of the tees back.”

The Kerrys – and the whole team – are proud to say the greens are now predominantly bent (with roughly) 30% fescue and 5% meadowgrass. Their aeriation programme varies – they used to do once a year but aerated three times last year after soften solid tining, with sowing in October. They overseed around three times a year with two types of grasses.

Roger said: “If I’ve ever taken it to a good level, and we’re working with Rhys for a few weeks I think he can take it on to another level.”

John added: “Of course, at that time we didn’t have vertidrainers or slotted, so it was a case of hand forking the greens. We gradually got them fitter, so you could play the running game.”

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**OPEN SUPPORT TEAM**

Join the BIGGA Open Support Team at The Open 2014, at Royal Liverpool

Applications are now open for a place on BIGGA’s Open Support Team for the 143rd Open Championship at Royal Liverpool Golf Club next July. We require full BIGGA members to join our team behind the scenes. They will be supporting the home greenkeeping team at Hoylake by taking numbers alongside the players during the four rounds.

You may also be required to complete early morning preparation work and evening divot repairing. It’s a real development opportunity from both a professional and personal point of view. You will gain an understanding of the technical preparations from the home greenkeeping team and sample the atmosphere of one of the world’s greatest golf tournaments.

You will also spend several days with greenkeepers from across the UK and the world with many remaining firm friends for years to come.

You will receive accommodation, a food allowance, daily transport to and from the course, a waterproof suit and polo shirts - all you have to do is make your way to Liverpool. The 2014 tournament proper begins on Thursday 17 July with the winner crowned on Sunday 20 July.

To apply, just fill in the application form on the opposite page and return by post to Rachael Duffy at BIGGA House, Aldwark, Aine, York YO61 1UF by Friday 31 January 2014. We’ll announce the team in February and the successful applicants will then be allocated various roles within the team. Good luck!

| Name | Golf Club | Position | Age | BIGGA Membership Number | Home address | Email Address | Mobile Number | Passport photo attached? | Waterproof measurements: waist | Waterproof measurements: leg length | Polo shirt measurement: chest | Are you available for the Early Morning Prep team from Monday 14th July? | Are you available for the Sunday final night (20th July) accommodation required? | Any specific dietary needs? | If so please state | I have applied for/appeared on the team at: | Applied | Successful |
|------|----------|----------|-----|--------------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|---------|-----------|
|      |          |          |     |                          |              |              |               |                          |                            |                            |                            |                            |                            |                            |                            | I have applied for/appeared on the team at: |        |           |
|      |          |          |     |                          |              |              |               |                          |                            |                            |                            |                            |                            |                            |                            | Muirfield, 2013                        |    ✓    |        |
|      |          |          |     |                          |              |              |               |                          |                            |                            |                            |                            |                            |                            |                            | Royal Lytham & St Annes, 2012                |    ✓    |        |
|      |          |          |     |                          |              |              |               |                          |                            |                            |                            |                            |                            |                            |                            | Royal St George’s, 2011                    |    ✓    |        |
|      |          |          |     |                          |              |              |               |                          |                            |                            |                            |                            |                            |                            |                            | St Andrews, 2010                          |    ✓    |        |
|      |          |          |     |                          |              |              |               |                          |                            |                            |                            |                            |                            |                            |                            | Turnberry, 2009                           |    ✓    |        |

Note: A place on the team is open to all full BIGGA members but priority will be given to the more active members. Subject to the availability of sufficient numbers of experienced team members no regular team member will be selected for more than three teams in succession. A limited number of places will be made available to younger members and overseas members.

Please ensure that you have spoken to your golf club or Course Manager prior to applying and have arranged the time off.

To apply please fill in the application form and enclose a passport photograph and send to Rachael Duffy, BIGGA House, Aldwark, Aine, York YO61 1UF. Closing date is 31st January 2014. You will be notified in February if you have been successful.
IMPORTANT INFO

If so please state ......................................................................

Any specific dietary needs?

Sunday final night (20th July) accommodation required?

Monday 14th July? ...............................................................

Are you available for the Early Morning Prep team from

Polo shirt measurement; chest .................

Waterproof measurements; waist ...........leg length..............

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Mobile Number.................................................................................................

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BIGGA Membership Number....................................................................................Age .............

.......................................................................................................

Golf Club .........................................................................................................

Name ............................................................................................................

Closing date is 31st January 2014

Alne, York YO61 1UF.

You will be notified in February if you have been successful.

To apply please fill in the application form and enclose a passport photograph and send to Rachael Duffy, BIGGA House, Aldwark, Alne, York YO61 1UF by Friday 31 January 2014. You will be notified in February if you have been successful.

Please ensure that you have spoken to your golf club or Course Manager prior to applying and have arranged the time off.

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We need

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Return by post to Rachael Duffy at

I am an Overseas Member ...................................................

I am/have been a member of the PGA

I have attended three of the last five BTMEs.

I serve, or have served in the last three years,

on a Section/Region Committee ............................................

I am an Active Member of the BIGGA CPD Scheme ............

I have applied for/appeared

on the team at: 

Successful 

You are available for the Early Morning Prep team

Polo shirt measurement; chest

Waterproof measurements; waist

You will also spend several days

You receive accommodation, 

You will also receive food allowance, daily transport to 

You will receive food allowance, daily transport to

...
Go West

West Sussex Golf Club’s Joe Dormer triumphed in our Photo Competition with this frosty April shot.
The winner of the BIGGA Golf Photographic Competition 2013 is Joe Dormer, Assistant Greenkeeper at West Sussex Golf Club, with this fantastic picture looking over a pond at the club’s 14th hole.

Joe has always been keen on photography and borrowed a friend’s camera to take the winning shot on his day off, early on a frosty morning in April.

Joe said: “I’m so chuffed to win the overall competition, I really am over the moon. I used a Lumix G2 DSLR which I borrowed from friend and Sheriff rep Adam Hartley.

“I noticed the potential for a great early morning shot previously, that corner of the course is in a beautiful area, abundant in wildlife in a natural heathland setting. Usually when I’m mowing greens this area is the last place you get to at around 9:30-10am so I dragged myself out of bed on my day off to get this picture at 7am. West Sussex is such a picturesque course and is managed in a way by Course Manager Ian Streeter that compliments its beauty.”

Runner-up was Gareth Roberts, Course Manager at Hankley Common, with his colourful shot of the 11th tee at his club. Greg Fitzmaurice, Head Greenkeeper at Hunley Hall Golf Club, was third with a striking cliffside image taken on his course.

Thanks to all BIGGA members who entered the competition – the next best nine entries are included in your calendar in this month’s magazine. The top 12 were chosen by professional photographers Eric Hepworth and Alan Birch plus a judging panel at BIGGA House.

Joe wins a framed print of his shot, and a framed print from Eric’s wide range of golf course photography which you can see for yourself at www.hepworthgolfphotography.com. Gareth and Greg win a print from Eric’s collection.
WILL THE MOWER WITH THE MOST POWER IN ITS CLASS...

...PLEASE RAISE YOUR ARM

Nothing is more powerful than the all-new seven-gang AR722T™ contour rotary mower from Jacobsen. With a massive 48.6 kW (65.2 horsepower) Kubota® turbo-charged diesel engine, the AR722T powers its ultra-productive 3.15 metre (124-inch) width-of-cut without slowing down.

The AR722T glides over ground contours and climbs hills with ease – thanks to the exclusive SureTrac™ four-wheel drive traction and weight transfer control. See for yourself why the powerful and productive Jacobsen AR722T contour mower is at the head of its class – call your local Jacobsen dealer today.

FOR A LEGENDARY PERFORMANCE ON YOUR COURSE, CALL 01473 270000

www.ransomesjacobsen.com
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www.ransomesjacobsen.com
Master Greenkeeper unmasked

What is the BIGGA Master Greenkeeper Award, how do you achieve it and why should I apply for it? All these questions and more answered.

The Master Greenkeeper process was started by BIGGA in 1990, and a total of 63 greenkeepers have been successful so far, it’s rightly considered to be one of the highest accolades in the history.

Master Greenkeeper is achieved via a three stage process – education, training and experience, assessment of golf course operation and a case study and technical examination.

The certificate is open to all full BIGGA members, regardless of age and whether working at a large club or a smaller club.

But don’t just take our word for it. We asked some of BIGGA’s Master Greenkeepers to give you more of an insight into what the process involves, how it can reward you personally and professionally, and explode some of the myths surrounding it.

CASE STUDY ONE
Alan Pierce MG (main photo)
Course Manager, Ham Manor Golf Club

Alan began studying for his Master Greenkeeper certificate in 2010 to push himself and benefit his club and their members. It took him just a year to complete the process.

He said: "During the process, the greenkeepers who were already MGs were extremely helpful and supportive. The main challenges for me were finding out what the course inspection required and also fully understanding the exam questions. I had enough CPD credits to progress to the course inspection stage relatively quickly. My team and I put a great deal of preparation into ensuring that our internal high standards were not just met but exceeded throughout. I studied hard for the exams and was fortunate to pass the inspection and exams on my first attempt."

"The award has many benefits. My employer is very happy with what I’ve achieved and it has encouraged me by pushing me to maintain the high standards expected of a Master Greenkeeper on a daily basis. It shows real commitment to your profession."

"I know there are rumours the MGs are a bit of an elite club but nothing could be further from the truth. Every single MG I’ve met has been very friendly and approachable. They’re all from different backgrounds and different clubs – some have very limited budgets and resources while others have excellent budgets and resources. Some have three members in their team and some 20 – but all share the determination to achieve.”

CASE STUDY TWO
Colin Parish MG (shown inset)
Course Manager, Morecambe Golf Club

Colin passed his Stage One and Stage Two in Master Greenkeeping while at Ulverston Golf Club in 1999, then moved to Morecambe Golf Club where he passed his final exam in 2005.

He commented: "I wanted to be able to manage at a high standard and have an understanding of what’s needed in every aspect of greenkeeping. I had a HND and lots of experience which helped me pass Stage One. I gained a few years’ experience as a manager before taking Stage Two. I did not pass the exams at my first attempt so I did it a year before having another go. The exams were a real challenge and in the end it took me several attempts to pass them."

"Achieving MG has improved my confidence and self-esteem at work and in my personal life. I’ve earned real respect from my employees and they benefit from having a golf course that operates at a consistent standard all times even when opening to certain budgets. In fact so many greenkeepers who are incredibly passionate about their job and undertaking your MG goes in tandem with this."

"My advice to anyone considering going for Master Greenkeeper would be to go for it and don’t give up. Don’t fear failure. It took me five years to complete it. There’s supposedly a stigma around MG status but it’s not like that, all the MGs I met are down to earth and hard working. I don’t manage a high end course, it’s a normal members club, you can achieve it."
Les Howkins completed his MG in 2004 while at Cleethorpes Golf Club. He is now Course Manager at The Richmond Golf Club. He said: “I got fed up with people moaning about the MGs and how it was only in place for greenkeepers at big clubs, so I decided to give it a go and if they were right, at least I would have the evidence to prove it.

“My team and I worked incredibly hard to pass the course inspection and that was with a team of four and an annual budget of around £25,000.

“The process pushed my standards up and will continue to do so. It strengthens best practice and sets a benchmark for what can be achieved.

“It opens doors to other jobs as it really stands out on a CV. I would like to see it as the norm and the goal of every greenkeeper moving up the ladder. It’s not for the elite or the privileged few – it should be for the masses. Greenkeeper education has improved in so many areas and there is no reason more can’t make the grade – if I can do it anyone can.”

For even more on Master Greenkeeper, visit the Education section of the BIGGA website and click on the ‘Master Greenkeeper’ tab. If you’re a member you can download the Golf Course Inspection form and past examination papers from the MG section in the members’ area. You can also contact the BIGGA L&D team at BIGGA House for more info.
Bringing back the bees

Dr Terry Mabbett looks at how Operation Pollinator is making an impact at golf clubs nationwide and asks, what’s really in it for the greenkeeper?

Operation Pollinator sounds like a mission and in many respects that’s just what it is. Its underlying aim is to wage war on the disappearance of bees from the landscape and offer them the best possible habitats from the landscape. "For members there is an enhanced visual and playing experience, and for managers a fast response to their endeavours. Experience shows an Operation Pollinator programme can deliver beneficial results and effects 60% quicker than conventional management techniques."

What's being done?

"Operation Pollinator sites are established on free draining soils receiving sufficient light to encourage and promote high flowering and insect activity. South facing sites are ideal, whilst cold, north-facing sites with inherently prolonged wetness should be avoided. Site selection is based on these environmental and ecological considerations."

Out of play and undisturbed rough, alongside water resources, on fairway carry, alongside walkways between holes, around the backs of greens and woodland margins are all prime sites. Sites at the woodland edge, along hedge lines and across sunny banks with furnish additional nesting habitats for bumble bees and other pollinating insects. Seed mix selection is very much a 'horses for courses' choice with Operation Pollinator recommending, rather than dictating, appropriate species combinations. Three seed mixtures - Parkland, Heathland and Links - are recommended with the exact species formulation created by specialist ecologists and entomologists, in conjunction with golf course designers and agronomists. "Syngenta is not prescriptive in its approach to seed mix selection and choice. We simply recommend these mixtures as a template, but courses do not have to use them", said Caroline. "Greenkeepers know their courses best and from experience what species of wild flowering plants are already established and thriving."

Different species of plant obviously have different requirements, revolving around factors like soil pH and nutrient status, while different species of bees clearly have differing flower and food requirements dictated by flower morphology (shape and structure). But courses should aim for plant species and an overall selection with established successful flower formation and display extending over the longest possible period of flowering.

According to Syngenta the speed and end result of habitat creation will largely depend on whether a course uses a perennial or annual plant seed selection. Perennial plants will not yield much in the way of flowers during the first year, while picking up in the second year and coming into their prime in year three onwards. Courses wanting a quick fix and to get members engaged in the project could initially opt for annuals, to provide a fast stunning display and quick source of pollen and nectar in the year of planting. The question is, what will come up the following year depending how successful self-seeding has been?

This is an instance where greenkeepers can take the initiative and develop an appropriate mix of perennials and annuals according to the course, their experience of wild flowers and of course their particular preferences. Some courses are opting for non-wild annual flower mixes giving stunning displays of cosmos daisies and other garden Asteraceae (Compositae) which are 'honeypots' for bees. "Wildlife organisations and purists might be a bit 'sniffy' about sowings non-native species, but after all golf courses are not universally natural landscapes and many feature trees and species from across the world."

And it’s not all about flowers because these mainly dicot (broad-leaved) species will be growing within grass swards. Grass sward composition will have significant impact on seedling establishment and flowering success and therefore the visual and entomological impact of the end result. Caroline recommends encouragement of fescue grasses over rough grasses,

"Golf courses can be real oases for wildlife. Most have land resources and skilled managers that can create the habitat to encourage populations of bees and pollinating insects, without impinging on their members’ play." Golf courses are perhaps a better resource than other more traditional wild flower sites like grass verges. Indeed a recent report by the charity Plantlife drew attention to the ongoing deterioration of grass verges as habitats for wild flowers and pollinating insects caused by councils cutting too frequently.

The Operation Pollinator concept has its roots in a much earlier agricultural initiative, to establish wildflower and pollinating insect sanctuaries in field margins. The programme itself is based on knowledge and experience gained from the scientifically acclaimed ‘Buzz Project’, with over four years of field trials conducted by independent researchers.

So what are its objectives? Caroline explained: ‘The aim of Operation Pollinator is to establish a total of 250 hectares of pollen and nectar rich habitat across 500 golf courses in the UK and Ireland, to provide essential food sources and nesting sites for pollinating insects and especially bumblebees and wild bees in general.

“Operation Pollinator sites are established on free draining soils receiving sufficient light to encourage and promote high flowering and insect activity. South facing sites are ideal, whilst cold, north-facing sites with inherently prolonged wetness should be avoided. Site selection is based on these environmental and ecological considerations.

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