

Successful seminars

by Michael Coffey

DURING March the Scottish Region of the BIGGA and the North West Section held two excellent educational seminars. The venue for the Scottish regional conference for greenkeepers, groundsmen and convenors was the headquarters of the Scottish Countryside Commission at Battleby in Perthshire. The lecture theatre was first class and after an introduction by Neil Thomas, who acted as chairman for the day, the Commission showed a three screen, six projector slide show of their work in Scotland. This was followed by Duncan Gray whose slide presentation on the restoration of the famous Lahinch links had everyone enthralled. His presentation should be made into a film by the club as part of its historical records. Peter Park of the Scottish Police College then gave an insight into "low maintenance amenity planting". This was an interesting study in how to keep weeds out of beds by covering them with polythene and gravel which allowed the shrubs to grow through. A flowerbed constructed in this manner will in effect remain

maintenance free for several years. The final speaker of the morning session was Eddie Connaughton, sales manager of Souters of Stirling. Eddie, who has been involved in greenkeeping since 1978 and who went to Purdue University in the USA, chose the topic "The facts and fallacies of poa annua". Although he was at pains to point out that the decision to live with or without this weed was that of each head greenkeeper, he did illustrate some very interesting properties of this grass in its numerous varieties. It was perhaps a pity that more open discussion did not follow this talk. One fact that came to light is that at one University in the US there are no fewer than 110 varieties of poa annua under test to see which are the most suitable - thank heavens for the Atlantic ocean.... After a buffet lunch the session resumed with a speaker from the Countryside Commission giving an explanation as to how clubs might obtain grants for their offcourse areas, for tree planting etc. Walter Gilmour, horticultural adviser to the Glasgow garden festival, followed. His

slide presentation was most interesting and covered the previous two national festivals at Liverpool and Stoke, as well as the preparation for turning a derelict dock in Glasgow into a most exciting festival site. Walter has clearly noted mistakes made at Liverpool and Stoke which will ensure success for Glasgow and attract, it is hoped, some 4.5m visitors (at £5 a time!!) Golf in the public sector is often neglected, but the subject was covered most admirably by Andrew Murray, assistant director, leisure and recreation, Kirkcaldy district council. "Golf course maintenance from a local authority point of view" was his chosen subject. Maintenance would appear to be very much along the lines adopted by greenkeepers at private clubs, but there is more emphasis on the five day working week with only minimal work carried out at weekends, no hole cutting or mowing. During question time Mr Murray explained how he envisaged competitive tendering would work when applied to local authority golf courses, with private firms

bidding against the existing employees of the authority for such tasks as mowing, top dressing, aeration etc. All operations have first to be quantified as to time, manpower and machinery necessary. The final speaker of the afternoon was Cecil George, course superintendent at Lenzie golf club, who spoke on "A year on an 18 hole golf course". Cecil raised a few laughs with his observations on greens committees and lady members. Neil Thomas wound things up, with thanks to all especially Elliot Small. The day was very well attended and organised, and was a credit to all concerned, reflecting BIGGA's commitment to furthering education. The North West Section held their fourth annual seminar at Mere Golf and Country Club two days later. There really can be no better place for a golf related seminar than this club, which provides such marvellous facilities and equally fine fayre. This year's programme was introduced by the North West chairman David Lucas of the Tytherington Club. First to speak was

Neil Thomas, BIGGA's Executive Director. Neil gave a comprehensive account of the Association's activities, past, present and future. He outlined the considerable benefits available to greenkeeping members, gave details of the inaugural tournament and conference and of the trade show in Harrogate in January 1989, with the promise of a further conference in April 89 and a separate golf tournament in August. Neil stressed the need for all greenkeepers to join BIGGA and confirmed that the membership figure is already in excess of that at the end of 1987. He also 'had a go' at those within and without greenkeeping who had knocked the Association and its efforts, stating that BIGGA would go from strength to strength and that those detractors had better change their minds and join now or be left behind. The main aim of BIGGA once it is fully operational, is the improvement in greenkeeper training. An appointment is to be made so that the Association can have someone to co ordinate education throughout the greenkeeping profession. Neil Thomas as Executive Director of BIGGA has worked very hard since taking up his appointment last August. His workload is considerable and his achievements substantial, he has made many friends and trodden a very diplomatic path in what is a political

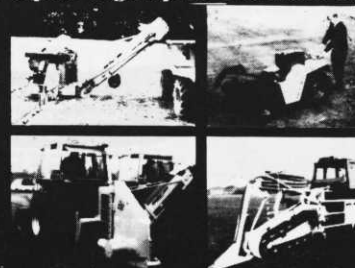
minefield. Above all he is resolute and deserves the support of the whole industry. Brian Pierson, the golf course constructor, spoke on "the construction of a golf course", he expressed his views on design and construction methods, advocating the use of professional architects (not professional golfers) and members of the British Association of golf course constructors, an Association which he helped found in an effort to rid the industry of its "cowboy" image. Mr Pierson answered a number of questions on sand only constructions, the ability of architects that he had worked with, and the tracking on vehicles used on and around greens, demonstrating his knowledge and expertise in this highly specialised area. After lunch, where the hospitality of our hosts was amply demonstrated, Jimmy Kidd, estates manager of Gleneagles gave a slide show of the restoration of the golf courses, the refurbishment of the hotel and the building of the additional facilities now offered, such as a the Jackie Stewart shooting school and the Mark Phillips equestrian centre. The very polished and amusing show continued with an insight into the preparation and presentation for last year's Bells Scottish Open. Gleneagles is a beautiful place and the whole presentation reflected this. As well as being entertaining, Jimmy is a good public speaker and above all

an enthusiast. If Jimmy warmed the audience up, Kevin Munt had them rolling about. Kevin, who is course manager at the Wentworth club gave another well illustrated talk on "the devastation of Wentworth". This of course occurred on October 16th during his first major tournament at the club, the Suntory World Matchplay championship. In one ten hour spell during the night the Wentworth estate and tented village were turned into a battleground by Michael Fish's hurricane. The fact that the West course was open for play by 1 o'clock that day for the completion of the previous day's postponed first round and that the estate roads were passable for the crowds is a great tribute to Kevin's organisational skills and to the dedication of his staff. As with Duncan Gray's and Jimmy Kidd's presentations, the clubs concerned would do well to video these talks, so carefully put together by their managers, as a valuable piece of club history. (Maybe we will start Fore Golf

Productions, and sign them up!!) Kevin's dry humour in the face of such adversity must have been another considerable asset and it is to be hoped that more audiences are treated to this talk in the future. Ian McMillan rounded off the day with his excellent talk on "Managing a Surrey heathland course". This appeared in full in the March issue of 'the Golf Course', it was once again very well presented and is expertly researched. All the speakers received an engraved glass memento of the occasion presented by David Lucas, who gave a special vote of thanks to sections education organiser (and chief comedian) John Lowery. There can only be a bright future for greenkeeping when events such as these seminars are staged so professionally and with so many speakers coming from within the profession. Sharing experiences, whether through the spoken or written word, must be good for all concerned. As Neil Thomas said "Education must be our number one priority".

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