

An open letter to members of BIGGA

It has been suggested that I address members directly, to emphasise that my non-involvement in greenkeeping affairs in the past months was in no way due to any feelings of animosity to explain my reasons for maintaining a low profile.

At a recent meeting of the R & A panel on greenkeeping in York, during lengthy discussions your executive director Neil Thomas advised that he had heard that I was not in favour of the Association and that I wished to see it fail. I was pleased to correct him, nothing could be further from the truth. Likewise one of the Association's trustees Peter Wilson expressed concern about my un-popularity with members, I was also able to advise him that such a view was in contrast to the reception that I am accorded by members who I meet, as well as by members of the Board of Management with whom I am in regular contact.

For some years subsequent to the establishment of EIGGA I had become increasingly concerned at the burden of administrative work placed on those few enthusiastic individuals who were running (in addition to their full-time duties on their own courses) the three separate greenkeeper associations, to the extent that some, if not all had had no holiday for two or more years. Clearly there was a great deal of duplication and wasted cost in terms of time and money as well as reduced efficiency.

This culminated in my writing to the chairmen of all three associations on the 20th September 1985 "offering my services as an honest broker to try to create some foundations on which the three associations could start to rejoin", and suggesting ways of so doing. This catalysed action, with delegates from the other two associations being invited to meet SIGGA on the occasion of their conference at the Younger Hall, St Andrews in October 1985. At that seminar and specifically in response to my urgent representations, Michael Bonallack promised, on behalf of the R & A, financial support towards the cost of setting up some form of centralised administration if the Associations got together.

Subsequently, I was active behind the scenes trying to sort out problems, chiefly made possible because I could telephone the main "activists" on the basis of personal friendship. I was, however, specifically excluded from any involvement with the Steering Committee negotiations.

I am perfectly aware that I have detractors - one cannot please everyone all the time - but my record, I hope, shows that over the years I have worked unceasingly to improve the lot of greenkeepers as well as the regard in which they are held as a profession.

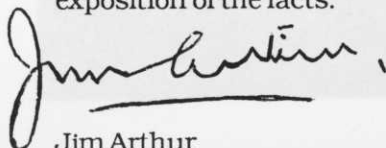
To accuse me of wanting to see BIGGA destroyed when it was my initiative which started the amalgamation is quite incredible. I am the first to admit that my initial aim was to set up a federation to streamline administration in terms of cost as well as efficiency, but if we lose what has now been achieved it would set greenkeeping back at least a decade.

My ambition, now never to be realised, was to see the centralisation of the whole of greenkeeping, advisory, research and education, as well as the greenkeeping association at one centre, to give it a degree of influence, at least the equal of the USGA Green section. In support of this ambition I have in recent years handed over to the STRI, with personal introductions, and every possible help in the handover, virtually all my advisory business, including full files, for no recompense with the sole proviso that a specialist golf advisory team was set up (which has not so far been done) purely in the hope that we might see a continuity of sound advice.

It is my view, that if greenkeepers are to be regarded as part of a respected profession then education must be the main part of the association I would be happy to assist with this in any way I can. It is vital to get away from the golfing society image and to avoid trade dominance of the Association which of course does not mean spurning well-meaning offers of assistance.

Since I am assured by so many people that my detractors are not a majority, I have responded at last, to repeated invitations to submit 'educational' articles of publication for the magazine in only because never has it been more necessary to agree the basic principles of greenkeeping, under constant attack from every quarter.

May I take this opportunity of re-affirming my good wishes to the Association and to wish it every success in the future, coupling this with the hope that it will make education the linchpin of its constitution and would also like to thank my readers for bearing with me in my exposition of the facts.



Jim Arthur



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