

ANNUAL REPORT

BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

THE following are extracts from Mr. Neil Thomas' Annual Report to the Annual General Meeting on 23rd March and published in the magazine for the general information of members.

MY first comments must be to say how delighted the Board of Management is to see so many members here today. This surely is an encouraging and positive sign of the interest in the new Association.

"For myself, I would first like to put the development of the Association into some perspective. I think it is too readily forgotten that the Association has only been formally constituted since 1st January last year and that there then followed a seven month period where the Board of Management was involved in resolving, both my appointment and that of the magazine's publisher. Certainly, this was a difficult period with members of the three previous associations anxious for developments and progress. I often feel that the efforts of the Board Members in steering the new Association through, often difficult waters are consistently under estimated and I would take this important occasion to publicly acknowledge their commitment in time and effort over a sustained period and to express my thanks for the support I have received from them all.

"Again, it has to be remembered that the office administration is not yet eight months old and I would venture to suggest that considerable and effective progress has been made in that time. Certainly these early months of the new Association have seen much time devoted to ensuring that a viable structure is established for the Association which will serve its needs in the years ahead. As you will be aware, some 24 sections were inherited from the old associations, spread across England, Scotland and Wales. The Constitution provided for the creating of five regions with Regional Boards to whom the sections would be affiliated. These Regional Boards are now established with each section having two representatives on its Regional Board. In addition, I saw the need for the appointment of regional administrators who would be the natural link from the Regions to myself. The five regional administrators have now been appointed and it is my intention to meet regularly with them after each round of Regional Board Meetings, which will be held four times a year. The Regional Boards will be responsible for nominating two regional representatives to sit on the Board of Management each year. The revised Constitution incorporates the structure I have outlined and you will be asked to approve this Constitution later this afternoon. Subject to this approval, therefore, a new Board of Management of ten members will be elected and will serve for the period running from the Annual General Meeting up to the next Annual General Meeting.

"After the first year, each Board Member will

serve for a two year period with one member per region standing down each year, although he can be renominated should the region so wish. This will allow for continuity at Board level. I believe there are already signs that the Regional Boards will contribute substantially to the levelling-up of standards within sections and enable those sections previously isolated to feel a part of the activity within the Association.

"My first meetings with the regional administrators have been most productive in establishing the general picture around the country and attacking particular problem areas in this early stage of our development.

"So, with the structure established, what then is your Association setting out to achieve? Certainly, in accordance with the Constitutional objectives, it will be aiming to promote and advance all aspects of greenkeeping and to assist and encourage the proficiency of members. I believe a strong membership package has been implemented since January with members now enjoying the benefits of a professional Association, particularly in terms of legal and insurance protections, benefits which have not generally been enjoyed in the past. The details of the membership package will by now be familiar to you.

MAIN PRIORITY

"Having provided members with substantial personal benefits, the Association is now turning its attention to its main priority - the education and training of greenkeepers and this is an area I will concentrate on in this report. It is a large and complex area and one which has suffered from a piecemeal approach in the past. Now, the formation of a national Association creates the opportunity for real progress in this key area. There has to be a strong link and a consistency of policy between the three main interested bodies, i.e. the Royal and Ancient Greenkeeping Panel, the Greenkeepers Training Committee and the newly-established BIGGA Education Sub-Committee. I serve on the Greenkeeping Panel and the administration of the Greenkeepers Training Committee has recently passed to myself in my capacity as General Administrator to that Committee. With myself in a pivotal role, therefore, co-ordination and consistency of policy should be possible forthwith. Coinciding with this, funds are now becoming available at long last for greenkeeper training with contributions due from the Royal and Ancient and the four Home Golf Unions. One hopes that this will be a permanent commitment, on an annual basis, on the part of the Golf Unions and that the 2p levy per golfer will be increased as the development and progress of greenkeeper education becomes apparent. It is therefore more important now than ever that common aims are pursued and sound delegated systems introduced to ensure the pursuance of progressive education policies. >>

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"There will most certainly be a need for patience on the part of members. What then are the problems we face as, with the benefit of a year's experience, we look to the future?"

1) First there is a need for a co-ordinated approach with regard to the eight approved colleges. Ongoing discussions on syllabus content are needed with the colleges and there is a need for the GTC and BIGGA to be represented at all meetings of the colleges' local Liaison Committees as well as at the College Lecturers' Liaison Group. The formulation of a broadly accepted common syllabus, with content of an acceptable standard, is a pre-requisite to progress.

2) Secondly, there is a need for the GTC and BIGGA to actively be involved in education in general, ensuring that the voice of greenkeeping is heard loud and clear. GTC and BIGGA need to be targeting and attending key committees and bodies to ensure automatic consultation on matters concerning greenkeeping and golf course maintenance.

3) Thirdly, training courses should be established in accordance with perceived needs over and above City Guilds or Scotec. The development of intensive in-house training courses is essential. Again, management training for head greenkeepers is seen as an area of real need. Indeed, should we be moving towards a recognised BIGGA Diploma and going out and finding colleges prepared to set it up? Or even, in the longer term, organising and running our own courses?

4) Again, there must be an ability to respond quickly and positively to new developments. Current pesticides legislation is a good example where the approach to date has been adhoc and I am currently engaged in attempting to introduce some co-ordination to the process.

5) Certainly, there is a need for the updating of GTC administration. There is an opportunity for an innovative approach which can set standards for the next decade. Through BIGGA concerted efforts are being made to improve the professional image of greenkeepers and nowhere is this more important than in the field of education. Some years ago, a greenkeeper training film was produced which is now out of date. Time and money spent on a new video presentation for use at colleges and seminars would be a worthy investment. This is just one idea for the future which needs detailed consideration.

6) Again there is a stated need for validation of colleges in general over and above the current approved colleges. There are regular applications from other colleges for approval. There is a need both to assess such applications and determine the criteria to be applied in the assessment process.

7) The question must be asked as to how do we know the current expenditure through GTC and future such expenditure through BIGGA will be

correctly channelled? In the past, the limited resources available have been spent on producing improved college literature. Now with monies becoming available, it is essential that informed decisions are taken in relation to expenditure. There is a need to assess the situation and make recommendations to the respective Committees.

"Having looked at some of the problems, we must now consider the way ahead. I submitted a report in relation to future greenkeeper education and training to the Greenkeeping Panel on 10th March. The Panel has now made certain recommendations which will be considered by the GTC at its meeting on 26th April. This is not the time to elaborate on those recommendations, but I am hopeful that the problem areas I have outlined can begin to be tackled at an early date.

"It can be stated quite clearly therefore that the Association will in no way be merely a golfing society. This is not to underplay the role that section tournaments have in bonding members together, providing a competitive element and allowing for the exchange of views and ideas. However, I do wonder whether quality is sometimes sacrificed for quantity. In any event, the golfing side will continue. However, the Association is affirming that it will be setting policies and objectives and at the top of the list will be the development of education and training for greenkeepers. There has been much lip-service paid to education in the past but no concerted effort. Now is the time for action and we hope that all golfing bodies will lend support in the future to the development of progressive greenkeeper training policies. Nobody should be under any illusion that there is anything but a long and difficult road ahead. As I say, we shall be looking for support within golf but if this is not forthcoming then, as an Association, we must be prepared to go it alone and approach the development of greenkeeper education with vision, commitment and enthusiasm.

"If I can turn briefly to those who, from varying points of view, have an interest in the Association and greenkeeping in general without being full members. The Board has established two other categories of membership - Trade and Associate. Associate members will be those who, although not greenkeepers, have a close interest in greenkeeping. They could be chairmen of greens committees, secretaries of clubs or maybe college lecturers. Whoever, they will be welcome as will be the knowledge and advice they will be able to contribute to the Association. Trade membership is now on a national and individual basis - there are no local or regional membership categories. Naturally, those joining the Associate and Trade categories will be given first consideration in terms of participation in and attendance at BIGGA functions, eg. conferences, seminars and tournaments. They will be able to use their membership on a national basis and will not be confined to attending only their immediate local section. This will in no way interfere with any existing relationships enjoyed by Trade members with particular sections. All this will allow for the enhancement of the Association's professional

image as well as ensuring that in trade sponsored events and tournaments, there is a common approach across the country. At present, trade sponsored tournaments are under review and I am talking with individual companies to discover areas of mutual benefit and how best they can assist the Association - I would certainly hope that we can interest such companies in the education and training aspects outlined earlier on, as qualified greenkeepers will have greater knowledge of machinery and equipment and be more discerning in their choice, thereby benefiting those companies with top-quality products to sell. I do feel that the trade in general, with some notable exceptions, has tended to sit back in recent months and await developments, being slow to realise the benefits accruing from their involvement with one national Association. There are signs that this is now changing and I look forward to ongoing discussions with the various companies.

"What then are the Association's plans for the immediate future? It promises to be an exciting year. It is important that an impetus is given to the new regional structure and that members quickly identify with their regions as well as their sections. To this end, there are encouraging signs of the new Regional Boards arranging conferences and seminars on a regional basis. Alongside these, it has been decided to run a limited sponsored regional golf tournament with a national final. Not, I would hasten to add, with the primary aim of contributing to more golf, but as a means of establishing regional identification during this first full membership year.

"The Open Championship at Lytham will see a major BIGGA involvement where we will carry responsibility for the bunker-raking duties. We have received excellent co-operation from David Hill, the Championship Secretary, in terms of meeting our requests for improved facilities. In addition to the greenkeeper marquee, we will be provided with a portakabin for office and storage facilities and another for drying-out purposes, as well as a radio link with the course manager. As a further safeguard against the elements, BIGGA umbrellas are now available as you will have seen and will be provided at the Open as needed. I visited Lytham last week and our site, immediately adjacent to the first tee, is an excellent one. In short, our whole approach will be a professional one and a major opportunity to project the new Association.

"Two major Association events are planned. The last week of September will see the Association holding a national tournament and international conference over a five day period in Ayrshire. The tournament will be based at the attractive Ayr Belleisle course and the conference will be held at the Concert Hall in Troon. The Scottish Region has established a sub-committee to plan and organise the week and it is important that we have maximum support from greenkeepers. With coach trips and visits arranged for wives and girlfriends, and an intensive stamina-sapping social programme promised each evening, I am sure that it will prove an interesting and enjoyable week for all concerned.

"In January of next year, BIGGA has entered into

agreement with a major exhibition organiser for the holding of a European Turf Management Exhibition within the excellent facilities at Harrogate Conference and Exhibition Centre. This will be held over a three day period and, given the hotel infrastructure in Harrogate, the opportunity will be taken for the Association to organise a series of educational seminars to run in conjunction with the exhibition. I believe this new initiative promises much for the future and I look forward with anticipation to it. The brochure for the exhibition is now available to Trade companies and can be seen on the display board today.

"So, with the regional tournament, participation in the Open Championship, the national tournament and international conference and the European Turf Management Exhibition, we cannot be accused of standing still! We have taken professional advice in terms of public relations and promotion and, quite frankly, nearly everyone has a different viewpoint. We should do this that way or this way and at this time of the year or that. The association has now decided on its plans for the next 12 months. The situation will be reviewed as we go along - don't expect us to get it all right in one go (although it will be nice if we do!) , but if we learn from the experiences, then that will prove progressive for the future.

INVOLVEMENT

"In all the events I have mentioned, their success or otherwise will ultimately be measured by the input from the membership. To make a success of this Association, it really is not enough to say "I've paid my subscription, got my membership card and now I can go and play golf when and where I like". This will not progress the education and training aspects I have already spoken about, nor will it help create a situation within golf, whether it be within the club, the golf union, or even the R and A, whereby the Greenkeepers Association is considered to be a professional body of service to its members, and contributing substantially to an improvement in the quality and condition of golf courses and to the standard of greenkeeping in general. No, this will come from each and every member doing his part in the Association and not leaving it all to the usual ten per cent who seem to end up with all tasks. The natural leaders and committee men need to come forward and serve the Association in whatever capacity they feel best suited to by temperament and ability. The individual member needs to involve himself; participating in his section events and in the national events I have already detailed. At each and every level, current members need to be seeking NEW members. Our membership figures are already at the level they were at the end of 1987 - but this is no cause for complacency and still leaves a tremendous number of greenkeepers not involved with the Association and possibly not even aware of our existence. The task for 1988 is to get to these greenkeepers and take them onboard.

"I hope, therefore, that I have demonstrated in

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this report that much is already happening and much is planned. Within the Association there is enthusiasm and optimism. Outside the Association, it must be said that we have some way to go. We will need to talk to the other major Organisations within golf, seeking to see how best we can co-operate in promoting the cause of greenkeepers. Although critical voices can be heard, it is my view that the way forward will include a professional working relationship with both the PGA and the PGA European Tour. They are often ready to talk of the need for better greenkeeping - now surely is their opportunity to join with us in ensuring this happens. We will certainly need to make many more golf clubs aware of the Association's existence and the benefits of membership for its greenkeepers. We will need to establish positive relations with the media. In relationships with

other organisations and companies, both within and outside golf, there will be no short cuts or doing what is expedient - the Board will make decisions it considers to be in the best interests of the Association - however difficult these may prove on occasions. The quality of golf depends on the course and its condition. This is all-important. The greenkeeper is therefore important within the game although this has not always been reflected in past attitudes. The new Association will seek to establish a professionalism throughout greenkeeping and an enhanced status for greenkeepers within the game in general. We will listen, talk and take advice but in the final analysis, we must be allowed to be independent and make our own way forward. I feel sure that 1988 will be a year of real progress and development".

Neil Thomas
Executive Director.

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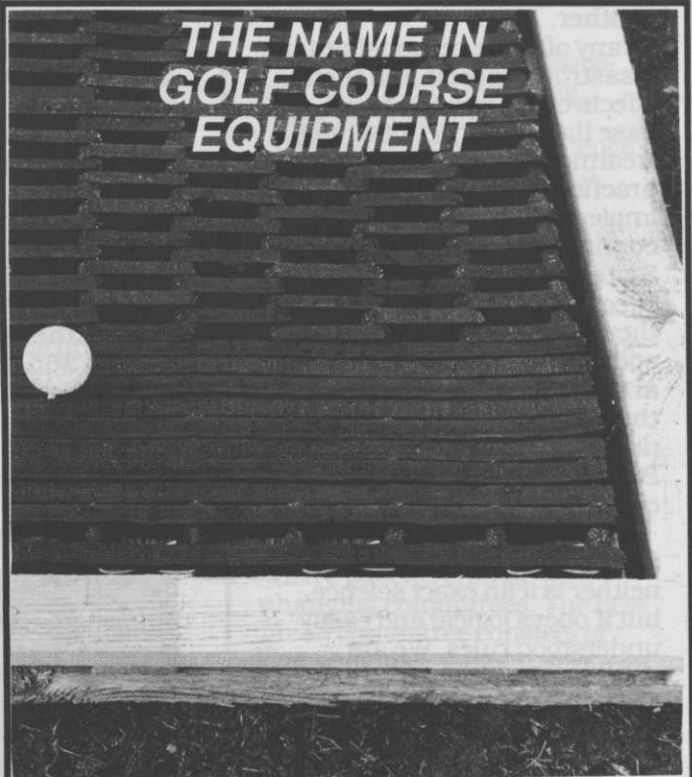
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