

# UNDER PRESSURE

**Living with the stresses and strains that come with the greenkeeper's job, by Gordon Childs**

IT IS just over 40 years since I followed my father into greenkeeping, and in that time I have seen a great many changes. Surprisingly, not so much in greenkeeping itself, but more in the methods of application.

It is what change has brought with it that concerns me. I have witnessed an ever increasing pressure put on the greenkeeper, and I know my views are shared by many old friends, some of whom have fallen victim. So what are the changes that have brought about this problem, and what, if anything can we do to help ourselves? I can only give you my views and possible remedies gained from a lifetime of experience in greenkeeping.

Golf is far more competitive now, so there is a much greater need to have your course playing well all year round. When I started, you only had a few hardy golfers in winter to contend with. Work could go on uninterrupted, but not so today. I remember in the 1940's, when water was not even installed on most golf courses, it was almost impossible to over water your greens, and the golfer was quite happy to adapt his game to fit the conditions, a skill which today's golfer rarely needs. Now I am the last to condemn the watering systems of today, but many have been over used. I am sure in most cases it is the pressure put on by members who want you to water, water and water in hot, dry weather just to make their game easier. Never mind the long term damage to the turf.

So, instead of the watering system being an asset to the greenkeeper and his course, it can become, if misused, a source of extra pressure in winter when greens are boggy and have to be closed.

The increased amount of golf

played now, against twenty or thirty years ago, has given us a compaction and wear problem on a scale not known before. To combat this we must aerate much more, all to the annoyance of the golfers. We also have to put up with comments from members who have read in golf magazines that we should be doing this or that, and what they have done to their lawns, and how much greener they look than your greens. The worst ones of all are the people who set themselves up as experts, but in truth know very little about the subject, but still seem to be able to convince members that they are right. To a young man starting out in greenkeeping, it must be very confusing to read the different views expressed by agronomists on their methods of good greenkeeping.

Then we have the golf courses beautifully presented on television for a tournament, and your members want their course to look the same, but without the cost, of course. We would all like to present golf courses in immaculate condition, given the chance, but money and time are in short supply in most golf clubs. All you can do is try your best with what you have and work to convince the club to change its attitude so that you can give them what they ask for.

At golf clubs where tournaments are held, the pressures can be even greater. I could go on and on naming the pressure points, but that is no help. So I would like to suggest a few things we can do to ease the problem.

First, BIGGA is trying very hard to help by promoting greenkeeper education, which in turn will give the knowledge and confidence to resist bad policy. It also gives the opportunity to share problems



with other members, and as the saying goes "a problem shared is a problem halved".

Another very good saying, is that "a change is as good as a rest", and I don't mean a change of job. How many of us work all day on the course then go back at night to play golf, and half the time we are thinking about tomorrow's work. This can only add to the pressure you are under. I am not suggesting you should give up playing - far from it. Playing golf helps you to understand the needs of the golfer, but more time spent on outside interests or even playing golf on other courses will help.

Too many greenkeepers never get away from their jobs, and that can only be bad news for you and your family. Not only are you boring to live with, but you are risking your health in later years.

We all need an interest away from work. I personally dropped out of the pressure area seven or eight years ago, and my main interest now is horse riding. I am very lucky that my wife Marion shares my love for horses. That is an added bonus, and makes keeping a horse much easier as we share the workload.

I can honestly say, and I speak from experience, that a relaxing interest outside of work will release a lot of the pressure. There are many ways to help yourself, but it is an area we all need to be very conscious of.