

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 of the 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

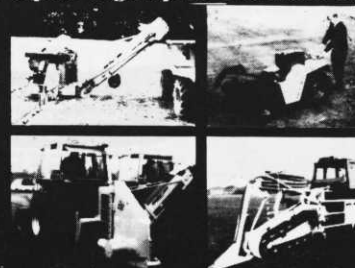
minefield. Above all he is resolute and deserves the support of the whole industry. Brian Pierson, the golf course constructor, spoke on "the construction of a golf course", he expressed his views on design and construction methods, advocating the use of professional architects (not professional golfers) 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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"Will local authorities be privatised?"

Anthony Davis assistant head greenkeeper of Wentworth's West Course poses the question

THE privatisation of Local Government work - what does it mean? Can it be stopped? Can and will they fight back?

Below is an indication of what has happened, and what will be happening to Local Authorities in the future. Also, if privatisation is a success, will it affect the greens staff at private clubs? The Local Government bill ("The Green Paper") which has sparked off all this controversy has not yet been passed into law but is still going through Parliament. Local Authorities are acting on their own discretion and are accommodating the Bill now. The services the Local Authorities supply, to which I refer herein, are the open spaces, ie. football and cricket pitches, gardens and golf courses.

The "Works Section" of the Council have split into two Sections in preparation for this bill, one being the Clients Section and the other being the Direct Labour Organisation (DLO). The Clients Section are a body of people who have to go out and size up the tasks, estimate and value the whole concept of the work involved, and when finally coming to a conclusion, send out tenders for the operation. With Local Authority

work now becoming competitive outside contractors can, and rightly so, apply for the work involved. This is where it becomes interesting. If the golf course needs to be maintained for the next financial year, which obviously it does, any capable contractor who has the knowledge and machinery to maintain the whole of the golf course can put in his tender to win the contract for the maintenance of the specified open space. The Clients Section will have a policy document guideline on which to base their work. Any contractor not meeting that guideline will be putting the contract at risk, and it is in his own interests therefore to ensure that he meets the requirements set out in the policy document guideline. This is also essential from the point of view of the ratepayers who will be footing the bill. There is a lot of unease amongst Council employees regarding job losses, loss of hours and overtime, and this is where the Direct Labour Organisation steps in. The DLO, the second Section of the Council, are the manual side of this set-up. They are getting themselves prepared so as not to be caught out by all the upheaval. The DLO will have

managers who will fight to win the contracts and to head the field in order to save jobs and money for their employees and employers. The DLO being on the same level as the contractor, also have to tender for the work involved. Therefore, one part of the Council has to apply for the other part of the Council's work. I know it sounds a bit primeval, but it does create stiff competition. The bill, when passed by the Government, will take time to phase in to allow the Authorities and private contractors to establish themselves, especially for open spaces as there are only a handful of contractors who can carry out this type of work. Initially, only a percentage of open space work (around 10%) can go out to tender, commencing in the Spring of 1989 and then 20% the year after and so on until they reach the target of 100% of Council work going out for open tender. By 1993 all ground maintenance will be going outside for contractors to develop themselves, that is if they can "come up with the goods" against the by then well prepared and established DLO. The Government will give exemptions to Councils if the total cost of maintaining specified areas, ie. a

golf course is less than £100,000 but the total cost must include wages, machinery and materials. The bill will exempt that amenity from open tendering, but if the Government feels this figure is sent too high it can, and will, be reduced and kept under review. So in all, the Council will be run more like two separate private businesses which can only mean better quality workmanship, neater appearance together with more of an understanding of the needs of the ratepayer. Pride will be put back into their work. When they have sorted out all the teething problems involved with this complex system, who is to say that, having won their own contract within the Council, the DLO may then start spreading their wings to outside contracts, putting in tenders for private work such as maintaining private housing estates, gardens and even golf courses, thus putting outside contractors under pressure. In conclusion, I would say an exciting time for Local Authorities and entrepreneurs. Contract greenkeeping may well be a fact of the 1990's.

Anthony Davies
Assistant Head
Greenkeeper, West
Course, Wentworth.

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GC/4/88

The state of the profession

by Jack McMillan
incoming chairman of the

British and International Golf Greenkeepers Association

EVERY season brings with it some controversial talking point, the present one being greenspeed or pace.

Greenkeepers are still receiving flak from all and sundry about the deterioration of the quality of the greens provided for the golfer, when the golfing press, professional golfers and the club golfer express concern.

Now might just be a good time to have a good look at ourselves, where we have been, where we are at present and where we hope to be in the future. Greenkeepers have never been unanimous in the past regarding greenkeeping philosophy. Hopefully, the news of the R & A's investment into researching this subject at the STRI might someday have us all working along similar lines, towards a common end - better greens!

The types of course we play on in this country are many and varied and there are times, throughout the year, when they cannot be compared one to the other. Links, downs, heath and heavy clay parks all react differently to the vagaries of prolonged drought or long wet spells. Golfing press, kindly take note!

We have also come in for some criticism from tour professionals lately. Professionals, week in week out, are privileged to play at venues where every effort has been made to give them the fastest and best surfaces that can be achieved without causing any long-term damage. From some of the comments we read it would seem that pace or greenspeed is the main point of contention.

To achieve the top level of greenspeed for tournament golf, our programme closely follows that of the Americans. Nitrogen fertilisers used sparingly, regular use of verticut reels and an intensive top-dressing programme. It is also

a fact of life that the best possible speeds are reached during periods of drought, when the greenkeeper can dictate the amount of water used. If God in his wisdom sends us prolonged periods of wet weather, this has a profound effect on the pace.

I personally believe that the amount of water from the heavens or from irrigation determines the pace more than anything else. Unfortunately when clubs have invested a great deal of money in very sophisticated irrigation equipment they bring pressure to bear on the greenkeeper to use or "missuse" it, although it should be mentioned at this point that research in the United States would seem to discount that moisture content has any real slowing effect on pace. My own experience differs from this.

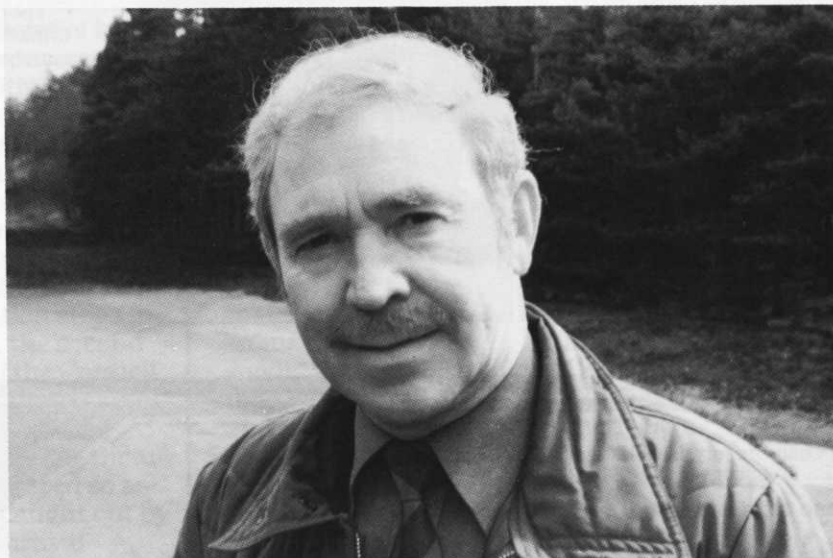
The height of cut has been dropped and greens are double cut and sometimes rolled to get the best possible speed. Ask any greenkeeper who has applied this programme and they will tell you that they could see their greens deteriorate before their eyes. This experience has been shared with superintendents

in the United States.

I am sure the plant breeders would agree that very few varieties can withstand this treatment for any length of time, even poa annua becomes sickly and weak. In the USA they have budget levels and in most cases soil temperatures suitable for aiding recovery from overseeding programmes, to quickly restore putting surfaces to normal. Our usual growing season at best lasts four or five months.

The only way to achieve a measure of recovery from this fairly dramatic treatment is to raise the height of cut to a sensible 3/16th of an inch as soon as possible after the tournament. This can, understandably, cause some resentment from club members who may, with some justification, feel they have been let down.

Unfortunately, the golfing public who attend tournaments, or watch them on the television, tend to think the greenkeeper has some magic wand that can maintain these conditions for the main part of the season. This is a risky, costly and dangerous route to follow



Jack McMillan head greenkeeper, Sunningdale Golf Club.



with, nine times out of ten, some long-term damage to the quality of putting surfaces.

Jim Arthur in this country and Mr Alexander Radko of the USGA Greens Section have, over the years, made clear their views on the judicious use of fertiliser. I am sure that even fairly heavy applications of nitrogen early in the season can have a lasting effect on the quality of putting surfaces for any one year. This is again an area where greenkeepers can come under pressure. The chap down the road has greens the colour of well grown leeks, and his members think theirs should be the same. Sometimes a delicately balanced programme is not easy for the greenkeeper to live with.

We regularly hear of how fast greens used to be, although at the present time we are cutting more frequently and at dangerously lower heights than at any time I can remember. Ask any older member of greenstaff at any club and you will find that greens were cut at most three times a week and possibly at weekends twice a year for special club occasions, with heights of cut never lower than 3/16th of an inch.

Compare that with today's daily cutting, throughout the season, and at lower heights of cut for greater periods.

Below the safe 5/32nd of an inch we begin to have greens telling us they are under stress, poor thin swards, being invaded with pearlwort and



The Old Course, Sunningdale.

parsley piert, "all the danger signals". I am sure the best possible way to find pace for major club competitions is this height of cut with double mowing, again to be raised as soon as possible.

Since 1977, when the Stimpmeter was first introduced, we have for the first time, accurately been able to measure greenspeed rather than depend on fairly fallable memories. Also, through speaking to many golfers, I have a sneaking feeling that the great majority of the golfing public like medium-paced greens.

Reading a back issue of the USGA Green Section Record it is interesting to note that they recommend greenspeeds they feel can be achieved for regular club golf and a target to achieve for major tournaments of any kind. It is made perfectly clear what they consider can be

achieved safely.

The following is what would be recommended for membership play: Fast 8'6", Medium Fast 7'6", Medium 6'6", Medium Slow 5'6" and Slow 5'0" and below. The preparation for any major event should aim at much faster speeds: Fast 10'6", Medium Fast 9'6", Medium 8'6", Medium Slow 7'6" and Slow 6'6".

Many of the old established clubs in the country take great pride in the fact that they always had fast greens. This can be achieved again but we will, however, experience some pain in getting there. I am sure that the research now being set up at Bingley will make this easier in the long term.

I have a feeling we might just hear about turning the clock back to less water, less fertiliser, raised height of cuts and less frequent mowing.

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Blueprint for a new course

THE new South Course at the Wentworth Club, which is now under construction, is probably the best researched and most professional golf course project ever to be undertaken in the British Isles.

Far from being an 'overspill' course for existing East and West Courses, the South course concept is that it will become even more famous than the notorious Burma Road and will stage major PGA European Tour events very quickly.

The man who has masterminded the South Course project is the club's managing director Richard Doyle Davidson. In his planning he has enjoyed one major advantage in that Wentworth is a proprietary club, run on business principles and as such decision-taking is not burdened by the committee process.

To set the scene for the South Course development it is necessary to trace some of Wentworth's history. The Clubhouse and golf courses were for many years owned by Sir Lindsay Parkinson, construction and mining engineer and when this business was acquired by Fairclough Construction Ltd in 1974 the club and its courses changed hands. For some years the company appeared unsure as to what to do with Wentworth, but in

1979 they sent Richard Doyle Davidson, then the club's secretary on a visit to the USA as a marketing exercise. A report was prepared as to what was needed to improve Wentworth, but no commitment was made by the owners. In 1980 a parcel of land adjoining the courses came on to the market and as a result 240 acres of mainly woodland were purchased from the Greyhound Racing Association to protect the club and estate's boundaries. In 1984 Faircloughs amalgamated with another large company in the building industry, William Press, and formed AMEC plc. Wentworth Club Ltd. then became one of forty two subsidiary companies within the group.

The new owners commissioned a study on Wentworth's future and came to the conclusion that there were three options open to them.

1. To do nothing - in which case club, course and owners suffered.
2. Sell - perhaps to another company more usually associated with the leisure industry.
3. Do something to upgrade existing facilities and to expand in order to increase revenues and produce a greater return.

Previously there had been two attempts by different developers to gain planning permis-

sion on the 240 acre south site these were for a golf centre, housing, as well as a golf course. These plans had failed, with the local authority turning them down flat, on the grounds that the site was in the greenbelt and also formed a local amenity for walkers and riders.

AMEC having considered their study as to the options on Wentworth's future came to the conclusion that an additional golf course was required to alleviate pressure on the existing two, that members of the club required better facilities both on and off the course where they were tired of competing with visiting societies, and that as golf in the UK is a seven month business, from May-October, additional facilities would have to be offered by way of a leisure centre to ensure year-round income. The company forecast a return of the capital employed over a 6-7 year period.

However the track record was not good, the site for the golf course was in the greenbelt, residents of the estate did not want additional traffic, the club members were not happy and all manner of local conservation groups were against the project as they wished the Great Wood as the site was known to remain untouched.

Despite these apparent



The drive at the South Course's 16th with the centre tree remaining

insurmountable odds Richard Doyle Davidson set about assembling a highly professional team to win over the objectors. His plans were not only thorough but can be regarded as a blueprint for any club considering extending their course in these ecologically sensitive days.

A survey of the site was commissioned and from this the chosen golf course architect, John Jacobs, with consultants Gary Player and Bernard Gallacher, made their plans.

Obviously most of the objectors felt that a golf course, by removing trees and introducing cultivation, would damage the local flora and fauna. Richard Doyle Davidson approached Dr. David Parker of Liverpool University's Environmental Advisory Unit to produce a report on the affect that a new course would have on the environment. The report, it must be stressed, could have gone either way, as Dr. Parker was totally impartial.

In his final report, a most comprehensive study, Dr. Parker concluded "Although the Great Wood to Knowle Hill woodland has biological values, as have all woodlands, the study has shown that only two areas are of sufficient scientific interest to merit their complete conservation within the proposed development. These are the

western part of the Great Wood and the beechwood area of Knowle Hill.

The alder and birch carr woodland and the western edge of the Great Wood is of high scientific value and is the only part of the site known to have been wooded for longer than 150 years. The beechwood of Knowle Hill, although planted, is also of considerable biological importance. The complete retention of these areas within a sympathetic golf course

design will ensure that the majority of the biological value of these areas is unlikely to be diminished by the construction of an adjacent golf course." The conclusions also covered the retention of certain specimen trees on the site, that the biological value of the East course was high as it supports heathland, woodland and grassland, and that the proposed South course would



Heathland on the 9th hole

BRITISH AND INTERNATIONAL GOLF GREENKEEPERS ASSOCIATION



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