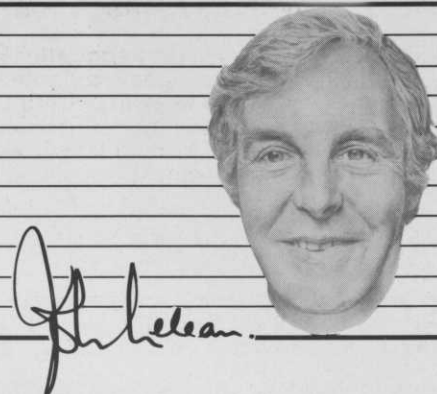


Greenside Comment...



OVER THE FIRST HURDLE

The way is now clear for the three British Golf Greenkeepers' Associations to join together as one corporate body, ending a long period of dissension between the BGGGA, SIGGA and those greenkeepers who formed their own Association under the EIGGA banner after the abortive Worksop AGM in 1982.

Following a series of Sectional Meetings of the BGGGA on the 1st October and the postal voting through the Electoral Reform Society an eighty percent majority voted in favour of an amalgamation with the Scottish Association and those south of the border who broke away and set up EIGGA four years ago.

EIGGA, who also held a postal ballot, recorded a ninety percent majority in favour of amalgamating the three Associations. SIGGA also report a unanimous resolution to join together, following their meeting in Stirling.

Full credit for initiating, what must be a sound and sensible decision, is due to the recognised world authority in golf, the Royal and Ancient Golf Club at St. Andrews, who have already offered to finance the setting up of an Association representing all United Kingdom Golf Greenkeepers and to put such an Association on a professional footing.

For too long the Greenkeepers have been the forgotten and neglected ingredient of a multi-million pound industry on both the professional and amateur sides of the game.

Like so many other sports, the popularity of golf has been enhanced in Britain because of two factors. Above all, golf has become a spectator sport through the development of colour television, bringing the skills of the world's finest exponents into the living room. With the drama building to a climax between the contestants has come the beauty of the stage. Surely in no other sport can one enjoy not only the game, but the constantly changing scenery, with its varying shades of greens and browns, complemented by the blues and greys from lakes and streams. It is this stage, the essential factor, where the contribution of the Greenkeeper is now fully recognised.

Because golf is such a unique game, through its handicapping system its popularity for the amateur, who can compete regardless of age or ability has made it not only a spectator sport, but one of enormous growth for the participant.

Golf course development started to expand at the end of the last century as groups of enthusiasts formed clubs to acquire tracts of land regarded as unsuitable for agriculture. The land was cheap, labour plentiful and a new society of wealth was growing through the country's expanding economy. What better place to meet and relax among equals than the local golf club.

Because golf was founded in this manner, with a committee structure managing the majority of clubs, the lot of the greenkeeper has been neglected.

Wages have always been based on agriculture rates, as it was from those ranks the greenkeeper was recruited. His job was seen as an extension of the work of the farm labourer - growing grass and cutting it. If he also showed the ability to play the game well, he was appointed to the position of professional, acting as the maintainer of the course during the working week and a teacher of the game at weekends.

Despite radical changes in almost every aspect of life, the committee structures have remained and unfortunately so have the attitudes for expecting the maximum amount of work for the minimum financial return. Only where golf courses are run on commercial lines has the greenkeeper been recognised and rewarded at his true worth.

In what other industry has the employee been expected to finance his training in his own time?

Throughout the late 1960's and '70's almost all industry in Britain received encouragement and grants for the personal training of employees from the shop floor to the most senior of management, but not the greenkeeper. It is now totally accepted work skills for staff are the responsibility of an employer, but this concept has not been accepted universally by golf clubs.

Many still refuse to allow young trainees the time off to attend college courses to study for the basic City & Guilds Certificate and because numbers are so low it has not been possible to develop these greenkeeper courses nationally in specialist areas, with the result that part of the course includes areas of horticulture, not particularly suited to the greenkeepers' necessary skills.

A classic example of the 'Chicken and Egg' syndrome.

A corporate body of Greenkeepers, backed morally and financially by the R & A must be the basis for change to take place. Until that happened there was no way forward.

Fear has already been expressed in some quarters that a united association of Greenkeepers will lead to a militant trade union attitude. Nothing is further from the truth. It will be a professional association with professional attitudes, obviously with the aim of enhancing the status of its members, but through a greater awareness of the need to improve the playability of the golf course throughout the year. That includes the management of resources incorporating men, money and materials and the knowledge to put those resources to the best possible use.

Attendance at numerous one day seminars organised by sections of the BGGGA, EIGGA and SIGGA during the past twelve months is proof of the overwhelming desire of Greenkeepers to learn as much as possible of the new techniques and for that matter the original skills of agronomy.

Agreement to form a joint association is but the first hurdle. There must now be sensible discussion without acrimony, on the method adopted to make the Association work for the benefit of all the members.

Four members of BGGGA, SIGGA, and EIGGA will be meeting in November to discuss the draft Constitution, consider a venue for the headquarters, appoint a salaried administrator and decide how, or who, will publish a magazine. These issues, the corner stones of a successful Association, did not feature in the agendas of the Steering Committee Meetings. Had they been included it is doubtful if the progress made to date would have been achieved. Whether they should have been items for debate will remain to be seen.

OVER THE FIRST HURDLE — *Continued*

Throughout all the protracted negotiations there has been a strong resistance to what has been seen as outside interference by individuals, who no doubt with the best intentions, wanted to exert some influence on the proceedings. Perhaps their motives could have been interpreted as commercial or self aggrandisement rather than altruistic, but on all counts they were rejected. The Greenkeepers have said from the outset they wanted to conduct their own affairs.

This is a perfectly noble sentiment, but it must not be so completely rigid they will not listen to and take advice on matters of organisation where others may have a better understanding.

The greatest danger now facing this fledgling, hatched by parents from an arranged marriage would be to push it from the nest before it had the strength to take flight.

The R & A suggested the new Association should be fully functional by the beginning of 1987. To insist on such a meagre timescale will be to condemn the entire project to failure, setting back everything so far achieved for a period so long, most of the present membership will never reap the ultimate benefits.

At the various sectional meetings and when Greenkeepers have joined together the topic of conversation has centered on the draft Constitution. It is a sensible and well thought out document, but it still needs honing and in places amending for total acceptance. That must be the first task of the twelve representatives.

The other matters can only be agreed after full, frank and exhaustive discussions and that includes a study of the workings and organisation of similar Associations. There is no point in trying to re-invent the wheel when examples of a streamlined version are already available.

It is in this area that the new Committee must be prepared to listen to advice from without and not reject out of hand, such offerings as interference.

Similarly the person who will ultimately head the new Association need not necessarily be a Greenkeeper by profession. He or she must have the interests of the Association at heart and understand golf, greenkeeping and the needs of the members, but one does not have to be a greenkeeper to meet these objectives. An ability to organise, communicate, influence and project the image of the Greenkeeping profession are the essential attributes.

These are exciting times, the amalgamation has been welcomed from all sections of the golfing world. A united group dedicated to the improvement and growth of golf courses, and themselves, deserves full recognition. We wish them well.

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and Course Maintenance

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