

Where were you?

AS A delegate to the EIGGA conference at Warwick University recently, I was both impressed and depressed. Impressed by the programme and organisation, depressed by the dismal attendance, writes *Greenkeeper* publisher Michael Coffey.

The organisation by the EIGGA board of management, and especially by general administrator Danielle Jones, was faultless. I have been involved in the organisation of such a conference and can appreciate what was achieved in putting together such a programme—Saturday was the best conference in my 'greenkeeping' experience.

Warwick is a purpose-built, modern campus in nearly 400 acres of open countryside with excellent accommodation and some of the best lecture theatres anywhere in the UK. The food was adequate and plentiful and while the cafeteria style catering may be economic, it certainly didn't appeal to me, but the formal dinner was excellent.

After lunch on the Friday, Dickie Jeeps, chairman of the Sports Council, opened the proceedings by commending all those who attended and ended by stating that he would return to his club and enquire why none of the greenstaff was there.

It is worthwhile to recap that this conference was open to all in the golf-greenkeeping industry at a basic all-in cost of £98 for three days, which is less, you would imagine, than one club member's annual subscription. So, why were so few greenkeepers and, indeed, members of EIGGA present? Perhaps it was not publicised enough although all *Greenkeeper* readers certainly received details.

There is, of course, the apathy that exists in greenkeeping, as much as in other professions, to outside-hours training and additional education. There is also the very real lack of support from clubs to pay for their staff to attend. No doubt all these will receive attention from the organising committee for next year's event at the same venue.

All this was of minor concern to those at Warwick, for

there was a noticeable atmosphere—a buzz as interesting paper after paper was presented. The variety of topics, excellent presentation and the detailed question and answer sessions impressed enormously.

As always, the discussion kept going well after dinner with many a clash or meeting of minds—very stimulating, even if you are not at your best the next morning! It quickly became obvious that delegates from a wide range of courses were concerned chiefly with similar problems—dealing with committees, chemicals, conservation and the like. There was full debate on all topics and a feeling that if anyone had any help to offer, it should be shared.

One of the definite plus points was the attendance (and subsequent editorial comment) by Malcolm Campbell, the editor of *Golf Monthly*. Malcolm holds the welfare of course and greenkeeper at heart and his news report on the conference was of great interest. I have no doubt that his points will be taken up before next year's conference.

On the down side, was the position of the tournament pros as put by Tony Gray of the PGA European Tour. The list of requirements for a tournament venue received less than total acclaim from a body of men who see precious little of the £4.5 million prize currently on offer to this elite band of professionals. Many delegates questioned the wisdom of allowing professional golfers to speak with such freedom and apparent authority without having a clue on how a course is actually prepared and what happens when 'the circus' leaves town.

A point put forward by one distinguished delegate who suggested that it is time for the PGA European Tour to sit down with the head greenkeepers and discuss what is practical for a venue—which has to be played for the rest of the year—met only with a lukewarm response.

The weekend was not all fierce debate, however. None of the diversions was more amusing or well-attended than the mastermind quiz on Friday night, won by a team of greenkeepers representing South Wales, but which contained two Scotsmen! They took away handsome decanters from the sponsor Rigby Taylor.

There was much to offer those at Warwick and a quality in depth, which has been lacking in the past. No doubt further progress will be made by next year and I trust you will be there.

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Front cover:

The tractor mounted Verti-Drain, seen at Meon Valley Golf Club. The machine was hired from Brian D. Pierson (Contractors) now one of the countrys leading experts in the operation of this highly popular aeration machine. For further details contact Brian D. Pierson (0202) 822372.

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