

BIGGA goes 'public'

The first major educational event for the British and International Golf Greenkeepers Association took place at Mere Golf and Country Club in mid-March. This is the third time that the excellent facilities at Mere have been chosen as the venue for a greenkeeping seminar – the first two were organised by the north-west branch of the BGGGA. Chairman for the day was Brian Moss, chairman of the north-west branch of BIGGA, who, together with all delegates, was welcomed by Mere's managing director Max Brown.

Walter Woods, who spoke in his capacity as BIGGA chairman, opened by giving an update on the progress made by the new association. He said that BIGGA, through the R&A and EGU, had employed a firm of management consultants to assist in the appointment of a general administrator who, he hoped, would be in office by June.

The consultants were also assisting the board of management in the choice of a magazine for the association.

Walter went on to point out that it had required a dedicated effort by all of the three previous association committees over two years to achieve unity. The new board of management was equally dedicated and striving to ensure that the association started on a firm footing. BIGGA was not to be a golfing society, but based entirely on educating its members, he said.

Over the last ten years, there has been much progress in greenkeeper training and the BIGGA chairman highlighted his involvement in the supervisory courses at Elmwood College, Fife, which are now in their fourth year. Walter said the registration scheme for greenkeepers must be improved and that, by education, a register of qualified greenkeepers must be a priority of the general administrator.

He stressed the importance of regional organisation to coordinate educational activities and the need to maintain the high standards for seminars that had already been set.

There is to be an annual golf tournament and trade show, along the lines of those held in the United States. Walter's message was that BIGGA will go forward quickly and with a united membership.

The next speaker was R&A secretary Michael Bonallack. He started by saying that the R&A's

role in golf was misunderstood and he welcomed the opportunity of putting the record straight. The R&A has limited authority and that what it has is based on willing consent. To give some background to this statement, he gave a detailed account of how the R&A came to be the game's ruling body.

The R&A is not the oldest club, that distinction goes to what is now the Honourable Company of Edinburgh Golfers (at Muirfield), but in 1834 King William became the first royal patron and gave the club the title Royal and Ancient. Membership at this private club comes from just about every golfing nation.

However, as is well-known in greenkeeping circles, the R&A doesn't own the courses at St Andrews. They are public and run by the links management committee, on which the R&A has representatives.

In 1897, there were no uniform rules for the game, each club adopting a variation of its own. A number of clubs approached the R&A and, from this, came the first rules committee, which covers the world except the United States and Mexico.

There is now a complete review of the rules, with the USGA, every four years. The rules committee comprises twelve members of the club plus eleven others co-opted from other golfing nations around the world. A rules decision book is produced every four years with updates every year. Rules covering amateur status are also produced in the rules book but, as such, do not form part of the rules of golf.

Another very important committee is the implements and balls committee, which is responsible for testing new equipment, golf balls, etc. Balls must be limited in the distance they can be struck to keep today's courses in a sensible playing form. The

game must not be ruined by equipment or balls such as the Polara, the banning of which cost the USGA \$4 million. Iron Byron, the USGA's ball testing machine sited at Far Hills, New Jersey, can now be outhit by fitter and stronger golfers. However, as much as is humanly possible, the aim is to try and keep things as they are.

Michael Bonallack spoke about the championship committee. The Open Championship was organised by the host club, the founders were Prestwick and Royal Liverpool, until 1920 when the championship committee was formed and the R&A took sole responsibility. It now runs the Open, Amateur, Seniors, Boys and Youths Championships, together with the Walker Cup.

The Open Championship has grown considerably in every aspect. In 1939, total prizemoney was £1,000 with a first prize of £150 and attendances were about 5,000 a day with the total cost of the Open being £1,525 against receipts of £2,400. In 1987, the prize-fund will be £650,000 with the winner taking £75,000 and the cost of staging the event estimated at £2 million. The spectator record at St Andrews in 1984 of 193,000 is expected to be exceeded.

The championship is budgeted to balance, with gate and tented village receipts equalling staging costs. The revenue from TV rights and licensing fees from the Open Championship trophy logo go back into golf. The variety and scope of these arrangements is staggering. The R&A sells live television pictures, provided by the BBC, to countries throughout the world, including the US, Australia, Japan, South Africa, Argentina and many others.

The money generated, some £650,000 in 1986, goes back into golf in the broadest sense. It is allocated to training young golfers through the Golf Foundation, through the golf unions and it helps young PGA professionals through the PGA European Tour satellite events. This is seen as good for the game and will create a greater demand for courses and

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the employment of greenkeepers.

Two years ago, it was felt that there was much uncertainty within greenkeeping associations and that they did not speak with one voice. As the R&A recognises that the golf course forms the most important part of the game, it was felt that greenkeepers should have one strong association. The R&A has provided money for the STRI research programme and for greenkeeper training, so that they can speak with one voice and with authority. This is why the new association will have its headquarters alongside the STRI at Bingley.

The R&A's panel on greenkeeping, although not all experts, is there to advise the club on how it should make money available in this most important area of the game. Although BIGGA will be run by its board of management, the R&A will assist the association with funding for as long as it takes to become financially viable, for it is recognised to be most worthy and of great importance to golf.

Should the association, greenkeepers or the STRI staff at Bingley feel there are specific problems that need research, the R&A will provide money for this. Michael Bonallack stressed that it was not the R&A's role to dictate. The golf unions run golf, not the R&A, and are responsible for handicapping, course rating, etc. The R&A has links with the golf unions, not the golf clubs - clubs are members of the unions. Therefore, the R&A has no authority to tell clubs how to operate. Help can be given where necessary and advice from its consultant agronomist

provided.

The championship committee advises clubs what is wanted - firm greens and firm, closely mown fairways - but the committee is happy to leave matters in the hands of experts, such as Walter Woods and Tom O'Brien. The R&A believes that these conditions, unlike some American courses seen on TV, are correct for its championships and that skilled players cope with them best, thus producing worthy champions.

Michael Bonallack ended by wishing BIGGA well with its first seminar and promised that anything the R&A could do to further the association's cause would be done.

The remaining speakers were Tony Gentil, deputy head of horticulture at Reaseheath College, who spoke about trees on golf courses. David Lucas, course manager at the new Tytherington Golf and Country Club, came next - his theme was construction of a golf course through to completion. Those who attended the EIGGA conference at Warwick last year will recall this talk, excellently presented and illustrated.

After lunch came Wing Commander Bill McCrea, secretary at Walton Heath, who delivered a paper on the financial and budgeting aspects of greenkeeping. Although many greenkeepers are now responsible for budgets, Bill McCrea gave some interesting views on how to present cases to committees who "hold the purse strings."

Malcolm Evans of ICI Professional Products followed with a detailed slide show on the im-

plications of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985. As *Greenkeeper* has pointed out, it is imperative that clubs themselves are aware of the requirements under this act. If you have any doubts or queries, ICI has a help-line (tel: 0252 724525) manned by Malcolm Evans, Roy Taylor and division manager Keith Cleverly.

John Lowery, course manager at Ringway Golf Club, whose clubhouse was recently destroyed, then detailed, in a very amusing fashion, how he made his own compost and the cost of doing so, contrasting his methods with purchasing from an outside supplier.

Sand and its uses on the golf course, by Martyn Jones, was the final topic for the day. After a lengthy description of what sand actually is, illustrations showing a sand construction within a plastic lining were discussed. The presentation was detailed and technical and it is by no means certain everyone understood all of what was said. However, sand constructions clearly do need different and careful management compared to more conventional forms of green.

The day concluded with a lively question and answer session. One of the most interesting points raised being the question of a levy, suggested by Wing Commander McCrea, to be paid by all golfers through their golf unions to support greenkeeper training and research. Upon being questioned on the likelihood of this, Bill McCrea said he felt it was something on which the R&A should "give a lead."

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