

Following the recent Stage III examination for the Master Greenkeeper Certificate, Laurence Pithie has been declared Britain's first Master Greenkeeper – after being the only candidate who successfully completed the two examination papers presented.

Laurence, Course Manager of Minchinhampton Golf Club in Gloucestershire, will be presented with his Master Greenkeeper Certificate by Viscount Whitelaw in Harrogate next January at the opening ceremony of the BIGGA (BTME) Exhibition and Seminar Programme.

Since the Master Greenkeeper Certificate (MGC) was launched at BTME in January 1990, many members have been striving toward achieving the magical 200 credits necessary for completion of the first stage. From this, four members moved successfully on to stage II, which involves a visit to their respective places of work by a panel, before moving to the final hurdle, the examination!

Shortly after examination day and before the results had been announced, Laurence wrote to our Education Officer, David Golding, outlining his views on the MGC programme. Such a thoughtful document deserves wider exposure and with the proud result no longer a secret, we print it here in its entirety.



Picture: Wilts and Glos Standard

# Britain's first **MASTER GREENKEEPER**

## THE MASTER GREENKEEPER CERTIFICATE – FROM A MEMBER'S VIEW

When details of the MGC were first published, I thought to myself 'do I really need to undergo a lengthy procedure of study and examination?' After all, I had 20 years experience in greenkeeping, 14 of them as a course manager, as well as gaining various greenkeeping certificates many years ago. In fact, there must be many more course managers who have greater experience than myself and who may also have a proven track record of hosting major events.

Then I thought, 'if this certificate is just about the number of years one is engaged in working on a golf course, it seems fairly useless and unlikely to be accepted as a meaningful achievement within the golf industry'. Conversely, if our profession is to meet the ever increasing demand for better surfaces and progress successfully toward the year 2000, then the need to establish a worthwhile qualification is greater than ever.

In 1971 the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) recognised this problem and implemented their own Certification Programme (or Program, as they spell it) soon after. It has been tremendously successful in raising the standards their profession and my view is that we must do likewise and learn from our American colleagues.

Education is, has, and always will be the foundation upon which BIGGA exists, for through training and education it can promote confidence, improve technical knowledge and engender motivation, which leads in turn to greater respect. Managing today's golf courses requires not just practical experience but a wealth of technical expertise in understanding the theory and practice of turfgrass management. If we are to change the public conception of being 'the greenkeeper that cuts the grass', we must improve our image.

The course manager must be an agronomist as well as a business manager and public relations officer, he should also understand the basic principles and inter-relationships of turfgrasses; soils; fertilisers and pesticides, as well as irrigation; drainage and construction. Together with this knowledge he must have the ability to train; supervise; motivate and lead by example, as

well as possess the ability to communicate ideas and plans in a professional manner when addressing committees or a board of directors.

It must be seen therefore that it is increasingly important for aspiring course managers to prepare for the technical and managerial aspects of their profession by attending college, conferences, seminars and management/workshop courses organised by our Association. Only then can we as individuals hope to advance our own careers and raise the standards of our profession.

The MGC was set up to recognise these aims and gaining any such certification should be regarded as a worthwhile achievement. If the MGC was simply 'handed out' to those greenkeepers with 20 years or more experience, or far worse, made too easy, then it would not meet the required objectives and be a complete waste of time. With this new qualification there will inevitably be a degree of fine-tuning required, but I firmly believe that it will be seen as a most thorough and comprehensive examination of all the technical skills required by those who seek to manage both golf course and course personnel. As such, it will be warmly welcomed by those within the golf industry.

Gaining certification requires that the candidate accumulate 200 credits – recognising one's educational efforts and commitment as well as years of practical experience. A successful assessment of the candidate's course and style of management follows, perceiving the desire that person has to provide the best possible playing conditions at all times and – not unnaturally – this generates a feeling of pride and fulfilment. It is, however, the third and final stage which demands the greatest self discipline – that of studying and being able to answer a large and varied number of detailed questions relating to every aspect of turfgrass management.

My eight months of self sacrifice brought home to me the reality that there was much I didn't know without further research. As a result of that research, the knowledge gained has proved most beneficial in my own career, as well as being essential in completing the final examination.

■ If you think education's not for you – think again!

Laurence Pithie's success story reflects his determination and hard work for the Master Greenkeeper Certificate.

This autumn, another BIGGA education process takes place. The management courses, held at Aldwark Manor, are aimed specifically at attracting greenkeepers who may not have received further education or greenkeeper training.

BIGGA management courses are entertaining – they're educational, but not at the expense of being boring, and speakers don't talk over your head.

Talk to anyone who has already attended, ask about the courses and what they gained from them, ask about the spirit of informal good fellowship that pervades throughout the whole period – the exchange of ideas and the sheer good fun of it all.



If that doesn't convince, look hard at the sits. vac. columns and see how the better educated command higher pay!

You too could enjoy the company of over 100 fellow greenkeepers: for more details, see the pre-paid management courses postcard facing Page 2 in this magazine.

We reckon there will be a big demand for places – so book now!



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**'The MGC... should be the aim  
of every golf course manager  
or head greenkeeper'**

7 ➤ For those who remain undecided about registering for the certification programme, let me remind you of one simple fact. Considerably more money is now being invested in maintaining today's courses and just as these sums increase significantly each year, so also does Club management seek assurance that the man entrusted to take charge knows exactly what he is doing. The knowledge gained through years of practical experience is both invaluable and essential, no one would disagree. Equally important however, and rightly so, is the need for technical skills and those of a manager. The MGC provides proper recognition for these facets of total management and achieving this qualification should be the aim of every golf course manager or head greenkeeper.

■ Laurence Pithie, Britain's first Master Greenkeeper, is 38 and lives in Tetbury with his wife Sandra and their two children, aged six and 10. He first entered greenkeeping in 1970, beginning as an apprentice at Bruntsfield Links, Edinburgh, whilst studying at Elmwood College, before moving to Moretonhall, also in Edinburgh and thence to Sandiway in Cheshire as head greenkeeper. Five years later he became Course Manager, Minchinhampton Golf Club, a position he has held for some ten years.

On three occasions Laurence has visited the USA as National Greenkeeper and Groundsman of The Year, presenting papers on turfgrass management to an international audience in Houston, Texas. When not at Minchinhampton he can often be found photographing other golf courses and now possesses a large collection of slides, books and other literature relating to golf course management. Not surprisingly, his 'other' interests are sporting and include both golf and badminton.

**The Joint Golf Course Committee**

**'Great cause' continues**

After the announcement in the June issue of Greenkeeper International that the R&A had created The Joint Golf Course Committee, a decision to broaden the horizon for greenkeeper education has been taken. The appointment of Bob McLaren as Chairman of the JGCC Greenkeeper Training and Recruitment Panel will come as no surprise to those who have been following the fortunes of "The Way Forward."

Bob's volunteer support of golf has been highly visible for many years and significantly his professional career was in the field of education. After a number of years in the Glasgow Education System, McLaren became head teacher at Quarriers School for Special Education near Largs, where he now lives. Before retirement, Bob was active in the game as Ayrshire delegate to the Scottish Golf Union, which led to him being elected President in 1989.

As a member, now Chairman, of the Greenkeeper Training Committee from 1984 and a member of the four man R&A committee commissioned to further the cause of "The Way Forward", this first chairman of a Joint Golf Course Committee Panel stated quite simply, "I expect the next few years to be of great benefit to Golf Clubs and golfers". Of course, that is exactly what Bob McLaren has been doing for a long time past; so why should we expect less now?

Readers of Greenkeeper International are first to know the Terms of Reference for the JGCC. Here are extracts of consequence for greenkeepers.

- 'To recommend standards of golf course construction and maintenance.
- To work with National Golf Unions and other organisations for the improvement of education and professional standards for greenkeepers.
- To promote golf-related turf research.
- To ensure availability of effective agronomic and technical advice.
- To encourage more effective committee structures and the formation of long term management plans within Clubs.
- To raise funds for the furtherance of stated objectives'.

If anyone can give reasons why these objectives are not in the best interests of golf, let him or her speak out in the next issue of Greenkeeper International. More to the point, the writer would love to hear from anyone with bright ideas towards dealing with the last of these Terms. Golfers are well known for their generosity in the clubhouse bar, let's hope they will spare the cost of a pint a year on behalf of one of the hot topics they pontificate upon, that being - whether they know it or not - "The Great Cause".

● The writer, Eric Shiel, is Executive Director of the Joint Golf Course Committee.