

# A year of decisions



Annual  
Report  
1991

A summary of the Association's work and progress, by BIGGA Executive Director NEIL THOMAS

In preparing this report, it is pleasing to look back and observe what an active Association we have and how much is happening throughout the country to enhance the status of both our members and the whole greenkeeping profession. At the outset I am reporting on a year of sustained development and progress. Conversely, it has proved to be a difficult, indeed the most difficult, year that this Association has ever faced or is likely to face.

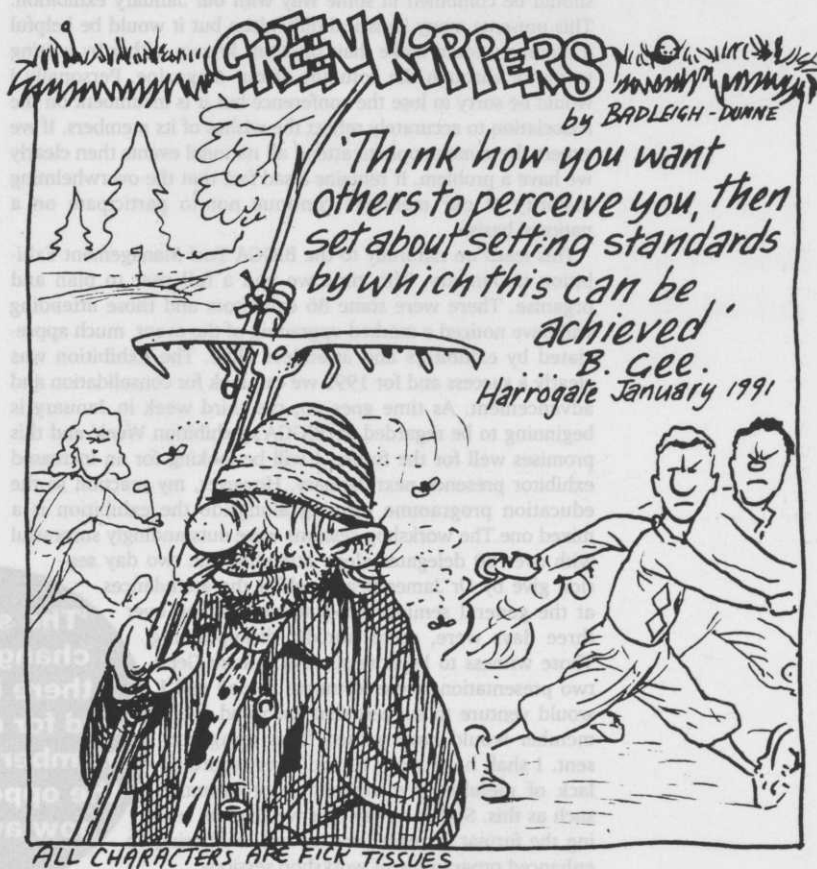
It has been a year in which major decisions have been necessary, crucial to our future well-being. We have moved forward at a time of financial uncertainty with, until the turn of the year, the Association's magazine in jeopardy. These two problem areas were inter-related and combined to produce tremendous pressures and a situation in which your Board of Management had to take difficult decisions whilst under considerable harassment. It has certainly been a learning experience which will stand us in good stead. Through it all we have held steady and been frank and open in our discussions with those who could offer advice and assistance. Since January we have moved into calmer waters, with an exhibition that was successful in organisational and financial aspects and with the production of a well received in-house publication, professionally developed and earning a secure and respected position in the market place. More recently we held a highly successful National Conference.

Membership continues to grow and at the end of 1990 totalled 3700, of which 3300 are greenkeepers and 400 associate or trade members. We set a 1990 target of 4000 members and our growing membership therefore leaves no grounds for complacency. There are many, many more greenkeepers who have not yet joined us and it is incumbent on all members to seek them out and persuade them of the benefits of joining BIGGA.

Looking back over the year one is struck by the increasing use of Aldwark Manor as a training base and the growing interest and participation of companies within the industry in our training courses. During the year a construction course was organised in conjunction with Rolawn and three compact tractor courses in conjunction with Iseki. In a reversal of the training role, Ransomes sent 20 of their staff to Aldwark Manor to be trained. Utilising approved college lecturers as well as greenkeeping personnel, the needs of the greenkeeper, relative to machinery usage, were expounded and the course met with a most positive response from Ransomes.

Our 'in-house' Management Courses were again run in October/November and were well received. It was particularly interesting to run an advanced course for those who had participated in 1989, a logical development which will be repeated by a third year course this autumn. There is little doubt that Aldwark Manor is now becoming an attractive training base - with the infrastructure a major contributory factor - for the hotel offers the added opportunity for delegates to inter-act socially and thereby enhance their learning experience.

During the year two award schemes have been undertaken - the Toro Scholarship Award and the ICI Premier Greenkeeper Award. The Toro Award was in its second year and the calibre of candidates - one from each of the approved colleges - is a clear marker of the improvements now apparent in greenkeeper education. The overall winner, David Norton of Beverley and East Riding Golf Club and representing Askham Bryan College, proved a fine ambassador for us during his eight week course at the University of Massachusetts. The ICI Premier Greenkeeper



Award was in its inaugural year and whilst numbers of entries were disappointing, the calibre of candidacy was high. Entry for the award demanded a substantial commitment and, with the award scheme now running for a second year, it is hoped more members will find the confidence to 'have a go'. The winner, Anthony Davies of Prestbury Golf Club, was again our excellent ambassador, this time at the GCSAA Conference and Show.

With the timing of the AGM a little later this year I am able to report on two successful National Education Conferences. The 1990 Conference at the Royal Holloway and Bedford New College was blessed with heatwave conditions last April. The speaker programme met with unanimous approval and the college ambience contributed greatly to the event's success. The 1991 Conference was held recently at the University of York and proved an outstanding success with the speaker programme maintaining, if not surpassing, the quality of previous conferences. All three conferences have climaxed in memorable banquets and there is no doubt that our National Conference has a unique place in the greenkeeping world - much appreciated by the growing number of international delegates who attend. We should not underestimate the value of the conference in projecting the Association most positively to a wider audience within the game of golf. This is a real learning experience - three days of intensive lectures on a wide range of greenkeeping subjects - and those who have attended past conferences have gained lasting education benefits. It was pleasing that numbers



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# A chance to consolidate our success in the future

→ were up significantly, long may the trend continue. Equally pleasing has been the large postbag received from delegates congratulating the Association on the organisation and quality of the conference.

There is a view amongst many members that the conference should be combined in some way with our January exhibition. This presents many logistical difficulties but it would be helpful if members could make their thoughts known, either by writing to me or through the columns of our magazine. Personally I would be sorry to lose the conference but it is incumbent on the Association to accurately reflect the wishes of its members. If we expect the same people to attend all national events then clearly we have a problem. It remains a sad fact that the overwhelming majority of our members continue not to participate on a national basis.

This leads on naturally to the BIGGA Turf Management Exhibition in January. This time we had a full year to plan and organise. There were some 86 exhibitors and those attending will have noticed a marked upgrading of the event, much appreciated by exhibitors and attendees alike. The Exhibition was clearly a success and for 1992 we can look for consolidation and advancement. As time goes on, the third week in January is beginning to be regarded as 'BIGGA's Exhibition Week' and this promises well for the future. I will be looking for an increased exhibitor presence next January. However, my reaction to the education programme running alongside the exhibition is a mixed one. The workshop sessions were outstandingly successful with over 80 delegates alone attending the two day session give by Dr James Beard, whilst the attendances at the general seminar programme running over three days were, quite frankly, disappointing. Two witness to keynote speaker Bobbie Gee's two presentations were fortunate indeed and I would venture to suggest that each and every member would have gained from being present. I shall have more to add later regarding lack of member involvement in programmes such as this. Suffice to say that we shall be revising the format for next year as well as offering an enhanced programme of workshop sessions.

On the wider education front, the development of our Master Greenkeeper Certificate has moved on apace. We now have 46 members registered; with many more eagerly seeking the 200 credits before registering and moving on to stages two and three. The Certificate has had a marked impact on greenkeeper education, creating a much greater awareness amongst members of the need for education and training. Indeed, many who had long since lapsed in education aspirations now find themselves studying again with renewed enthusiasm. The development of the scheme has been noticeable for the excellent co-operation with the approved colleges represented on the working party; which meets periodically at Aldwark Manor to review, monitor and update the scheme. This co-operation is leading to an equally effective joint approach to many other aspects of greenkeeper education. However, we have still to convince the four Home Unions of the validity and benefits of the Certificate and this will be a task for the forthcoming year. The first four candidates sat their finals last month and hopefully we shall soon be able to announce the first holders of The Master Greenkeeper Certificate.

There are many members who suffered in the past when educational opportunities were not available. As mature greenkeepers they are naturally apprehensive of attending colleges or undertaking examinations. It is therefore pleasing to report on the recent introduction by Elmwood College of an Accreditation of Prior Learning Scheme. This is a new service which takes account of previous achievements, skills and knowledge to credit participants with nationally recognised qualifications which

they may previously have lacked. Achievements are first identified, then matched to existing qualifications and finally assessed. Past learning and practical achievements can be credited providing a participant can show sufficient evidence that he can meet the standards of the qualifications he would be gaining. The modules which can be credited will be listed on the National Certificate Award, which is issued by the Scottish Vocational Education Council (SCOTVEC). It is anticipated that the scheme will in time be adopted nationally and of greater importance, qualifications obtained in this way will count towards the Master Greenkeeper Certificate. As we progress educationally therefore, there are opportunities for every member, with little doubt that an exciting future beckons the trained and qualified greenkeeper.

At this point I must address a trend which has been all too apparent during the past year – that of the inertia of so many of our members to better themselves. Opportunities are clearly available through approved training colleges and the many courses and seminars being established by BIGGA, as well as through pursuit of the Master Greenkeeper Certificate. Yet we quite often struggle for numbers. There can be no justification for disappointing numbers at the Exhibition Seminar programme or at other educational events. Considerable progress has been made with employers in getting them to accept their responsibilities in the field of education and training. Our Education Officer, David Golding, had addressed a whole series of meetings attended by club secretaries and green chairmen during the past year and we are now obtaining a large measure of favourable employer response. However, it is disquieting to hear employers complaining that they are never approached and conclude that their employees have little interest in furthering their education. Perhaps this is a too simplistic response, and within the Association we are all too clearly aware of the crisis of confidence which has existed for many of our members over many years, bound up in the more unpalatable traditions of the game where the greenkeeper was expected to know his place.

**'The scene is changing and there is a real need for many more members to grasp the opportunities now available'**

We have sought to instil confidence – many of our courses are designed to this end – particularly in the field of personal management and awareness. Members may be pleasantly surprised these days when they summon the courage to ask for support to further their education. To those who continue to experience difficulties, we will give all possible support from headquarters – but the initiative must come from you, the members. The scene is changing and there is a real need for many more members to grasp the opportunities now available.

It is also pertinent at this stage to report optimistically on developments during the past year in relation to *The Way Forward* document. A sub-committee comprising of representatives of the R and A and the Home Unions has met throughout the year; with the aim of producing a strategy to better co-ordinate the infrastructure of golf course design, construction and management in Britain and Ireland. Their proposals have recently been ratified and whilst this is not the place to go into detail, it is clear that BIGGA will have a key role to play in the administrative structure now being created. Over a period of time it is anticipated that there will be significant increases in monies allocated for greenkeeper education and over the next year the Association must be in a position to justify the allocation of such sums and thus move greenkeeper education a further step forward. Already as an indication of BIGGA's Way Forward we are in discussion at college level for the introduction of a full-time HND course in golf greenkeeping. Whilst high degree of member commitment and participation will be necessary, there is much to look forward to educationally. The R and A's initiative is exciting and will receive our full support and co-operation.



Turning from education, I would point to a few other events during the year which have contributed to our development and recognition within the game. The Iseki Tournament continues to be a great success and a means for our members to readily identify with their regions. During 1990 a successful extension to the tournament took place with the staging of an Irish round and this was further extended to 1991 when rounds were played in Northern and Southern Ireland last month. Relationships with our Irish members and those interested in joining the Association over the water have been strengthened considerably and will, I'm sure, continue. The Iseki event is eagerly anticipated and the 1990 final at Moortown in September was blessed with a finely prepared course and a grand atmosphere, enhanced further by the regional team competitions, now an integral part.

In referring to regions, I would mention the success of the WESTURF Exhibition organised on a regional basis to meet the needs of the South West and Wales Region. This really is an excellently organised local event, with full credit to Gordon Child and his team for its successful establishment. Regional initiatives in terms of fund raising and bringing members together are vital and this is an outstanding example of just such initiative.

In July we gathered at St Andrews for The Open, blessed with the most glorious weather. From BIGGA's view this was perhaps our most successful Open. The assistance offered by our members to Walter Woods and his staff went without hitch and was much appreciated by the R and A. Our thanks are due to Walter for securing a really excellent site, which ensured record numbers of visitors to our marquee. Additionally our thanks to the Scottish region for their excellent organisation and the hard work undertaken by a number of individuals.

Hardly returned from St Andrews, we were straight into our National Tournament at Ganton. Again the weather was excellent and though the fairways had suffered by drought it was a privilege to play this majestic course. The Tournament continues to attract a regular nucleus - many of whom have been coming for more years than they care to remember. Changes in format have been suggested and these will be made, though it is important that traditions are not lost, particularly in terms of promoting it as a family event and social occasion as well as a golf tournament. What is needed is an influx of new competitors. We are moving around some of the finest courses in the country and 1991 takes us to another much revered course, Royal St David's at Harlech. Having visited with Club officials, I can vouch for the playing qualities awaiting you in August.

Finally in the golfing calendar, we turn to the Kubota Tournament held annually at The Belfry in October. This held particular significance in 1990 because we managed to lose the trophy we had held for five years. A splendid well-run tournament - remember if you wish to qualify you must participate in the National Tournament.

I will conclude by picking three highlights from the year. In September at Prestatyn Golf Club, at a meeting attended by seventy interested people, we formed a North Wales Section to meet the needs of an area which previously had undoubtedly been geographically isolated. This was most certainly a highlight of my year, and not only because I was back across the border! One could not fail to be impressed by the enthusiasm generated and it is clear the Association will have a strong section in that area. This is the first new section set up since the establishment of BIGGA in 1987 and as such has been widely welcomed.

In February, Chairman Ivor Scoones, Debbie Savage and myself represented BIGGA at the GCSAA Conference and Show in Las Vegas, where we had our own stand. We made many international contacts and generated much potential interest for new members, subscribers and advertisers to our magazine and possible exhibitors for the 1992 BTME Exhibition. We can and do learn from the GCSAA, which has been in existence for over 60 years, but all is not perfect in their organisation and it is therefore rewarding that there are already some areas of our own organisation which they could, perhaps, beneficially study.

In March we were delighted that our President, Viscount Whitelaw, was able to pay his first visit to Aldwark Manor and we took the opportunity to officially launch Greenkeeper International during his visit. His interest and support for the Association is greatly appreciated and during the last year he has visited us at the National Conference at Egham, The Open at St Andrews and Aldwark Manor. He has already intimated that he will visit our marquee at this year's Open and also plans to attend next January's BTME Exhibition, where we intend introducing an award ceremony for leading award winners during 1991. Our President has a real 'feel' for greenkeeping and does all he can to project the Association at golfing functions around the country.

As a final comment, with another year behind us where lies our current status within the game? Certainly at Club level there is much greater employer awareness, which manifests itself in the numerous enquiries covering all manner of greenkeeping matters relating to salaries, conditions of service and contracts of employment. Relationships with the Home Unions have been strengthened and this will continue with the new structure emanating from *The Way Forward* document. Contact with the PGA European Tour and the PGA remains spasmodic, as does media interest in greenkeepers and all greenkeeping matters. Throughout, the R and A remain steadfast and wholehearted in their support. I believe we are structurally sound and there is much respect within the game for our progress of the last three years. We continue however to be under-resourced and must look within to resolve this situation. The generation of increased funding remains essential and will continue to demand the attention of our Board. This Association is blessed with a dedicated staff, whom I thank for all their untiring efforts in the last year. Ours is a happy and welcoming office and it is very apparent that members enjoy coming to Aldwark Manor. Much has been achieved, but for staff and members there remains a great deal still to be done as we jointly seek full professional recognition for greenkeepers and the further advancement of this fine profession.

I conclude with sincere thanks to our retiring Chairman, Ivor Scoones, for all he has achieved during his year of office. I have enjoyed his constant and steadfast support through many difficult days this past year. His commitment and enthusiasm is there for all to see and I am sure he will look back on the many positive developments that took place during his office. Ivor won't mind me saying that he is one of a fairly select group of greenkeepers whose efforts over many years are at last being rewarded in the strides forward now being taken in the profession. We owe much to this group, without whose efforts today's achievements would not be possible. Ivor will continue to serve on the Board and we will draw on his considerable experience. I am sure also that you will all join with me in wishing Ivor's wife, Anne, a full and speedy recovery from her current illness. Thank you, Ivor, for all you have done.



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**'Much has been achieved, but for staff and members there remains a great deal still to be done'**

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