

No ordinary year

In conversation with David White, BIGGA Chairman IVOR SCOONES talks of an exceptional year in his life – when chairing Association affairs became ‘not so much a job, more a way of life!’

As my term of office draws to a close I look back on a highly charged and eventful year – certainly no ordinary one – with pride at the honour that was bestowed upon me and gratitude for the privilege of having worked with such dedicated board members. Coming into board management in the Association was no overnight affair, for I have been involved with green-keeping committees since as far back as I can remember. I was National Chairman of BGGGA back in '72, served as a section secretary for seven years and held most other offices at one time or another. I did once fancifully try to retire from committee life, but they say ‘once a committee man, always a committee man’, and I was soon dragged back – without too much pain or displeasure I might add – for it can be hugely rewarding.

I've been a greenkeeper for 31 years, 28 of them at my beloved Long Ashton and have enjoyed wonderful support from the membership. Indeed, they've shared equally in the pleasure, pride and honour that comes with my being Chairman of BIGGA. It appears the kudos rubs off on everyone – my wife, my family, my wonderfully loyal team of three green staff and my members. All have appeared to gain pleasure from my experience and though sacrifices had had to be made, especially as being chairman demands a 25 hour clock, the shared pride has made it doubly worthwhile for me.

I first learned of becoming chairman some three years ago when Jack McMillan ended his term of office. Tradition has it that the outgoing chairman names the man he considers worthy to take the vacant vice-chairman post – after a little ‘sounding out’ – with his choice then put to the board for approval. With board work taking such huge chunks of one's time, especially that of chairman, it is vital to get these soundings dealt with early on – for the year of office is such that planning must be programmed well in advance in order that the candidate, his family and his Golf Club can make the jig-saw fit together properly.

Fortune shone on me in 1989 through serving as vice-chairman alongside Paddy McCarron. His was no uneventful year either and the one sure thing that can be said about Paddy is that he would have made a marvellous politician, skilled as he is at pouring oil onto troubled waters. With every year the Association grows bigger and more ambitious, especially in the field of education, which ensures that careers in greenkeeping are better and more fulfilling for those involved. With this growth comes the revelation for board members that more and more time is demanded for official matters. If you are unaware upon joining the board, the realisation is soon thrust upon you that there is no place for the half-hearted or only slightly dedicated.

Called officially to the ‘chair’ at Egham, I was in no way under any illusion that this would be the start of a year of fun. There were rumblings – even then – with the major problem being the failure of the then magazine to serve as a proper form of communication and reflect the true voice and spirit of members.

Like any new Association, for that is what we are, we have growing pains, because we are growing at such a frightening rate. My own personal view was that we needed to slow down and consolidate. It's nice to get all these new things but unless you get them on a firm footing circumstances can change, especially on the financial side. We had done things that were complete necessities, education being our major project and priority,

but in the main the golf world was not supporting us, other than the R & A who have been and remain a most marvellous mainstay. We had to find the money and there was a degree of anguish and squealing.

George Malcolm has been my vice-chairman and we've enjoyed a good close working relationship. I guess one tends to look at situations as they arise and realise that many current things will still be ‘bubbling in the pot’ after one's term is done. I've tried to pass on my experiences and endeavoured to ensure solid continuity. Certainly the biggest task has been to attempt to keep every board member advised of all that's happening – a huge task given the continually evolving situation in relation to our magazine. Happily matters have progressed and I am delighted that these thoughts on my year in office will appear in our new magazine ‘Greenkeeper International’. The impact this magazine has already made it quite tremendous and I'm confident it will continue from strength to strength.

As a board we admit to being inspired amateurs, though by being in the deep-end we learn to become professionals PDQ. There are times when perhaps we might side against the advice offered by our Executive Director, and rather like a Golf Club committee, there is one problem that continues to beset us, namely continuity. We don't know the answer to that one, but perhaps we are not alone, since 90% of Golf Clubs have the same thorny problem.

Essentially Neil and I work closely together and he gives me a weekly report of current happenings. As chairman it is incumbent upon me to decide with Neil those things which require board attention, for clearly with so much happening if every single item was to reach the discussion table the permanent staff would be kept busy 24 hours a day just churning out relevant papers.

To redress what may appear as a picture of ‘all work and no play’, there have been many wonderful times throughout the year. At Egham, when I took over, I enjoyed a fantastic week and the atmosphere of the place

itself was quite magical. I've enjoyed visiting other sections and meeting up with old friends, I've been thrilled at The Open, and taken great delight in seeing other members enjoy themselves at our own National Tournament and at the ICI, Toro and PGA European Tour Award ceremonies.

There have been trade and industry invites, and a delightful element of wining and dining that has seen my waistline suffering along with my golf handicap!

Asked what I would like to see for the Association in an ideal world I can instantly respond by suggesting that the golf world might look to providing the finance necessary to train all greenkeepers. Training is something that industry has been doing – and paying for – for years and the time is ripe for golf to catch up. That would be a first priority, with another wish thrown in for good measure that Golf Clubs recognise they are now in the big business league and leave professional greenkeeping work to professional greenkeepers. ‘The Way Forward’ document pinpoints the inadequacies of how many Clubs are managed and yet the very essence of Golf Club committee structure continues to ensure that there are amateurs who insist on making ‘their’ mark during their term of office. Thankfully I've escaped that problem in the main, though there's always one – somewhere – who wants to change the world!



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