

Equipped for success

On December 17/18th last, an inaugural meeting took place at Aldwark Manor between the officers of BIGGA: Neil Thomas, David Golding and Debbie Savage, and representatives of the various regions and sections-ecretaries, administrators and committee members. The purpose was to give an opportunity for those present to familiarise themselves with headquarters; staff; and facilities available, and for the officers to outline BIGGA's current progress and future plans.

Most sections were represented and there were quite a few new faces (seven of the twenty-five section secretaries this year being newly elected). Amongst the newcomers, I'm sure all were pleased to see Jane Ryan, our first lady secretary, from the Sheffield section.

On first impression, many were overwhelmed by Aldwark Manor's baronial splendour: lofty oak-beamed ceilings, grandfather clocks and the like. For a lucky few, rooms even had four-poster beds (no preferential treatment, but Jane had one, of course). Neatly tucked around the corner from the hotel, the BIGGA offices were a hive of activity. Samantha Flint seemed permanently occupied just answering the 'phone, with a visitor's chances of catching anyone else's attention dependent upon speaking quickly as they rushed past. The offices themselves are light, airy and packed with technology, but hardly large enough to accommodate dedicated cat-swingers! Neil Thomas later explained that another section of the building was available and that the Association hoped to make use of it in the near future.

For the body of the meeting itself, the party divided into three groups, each spending a couple of hours with the officers in turn. Discussions ranged over BIGGA's whole current sphere of operation, with the most recent activities being highlighted: the launch of the Education and Development Fund, the reduction of the Master Greenkeeper Certificate registration fee, and the preparation of a greenkeeper 'training' video. The latter is

intended to show the role of the greenkeeper within the game of golf. It is hoped to make the completed tape available to individual Clubs, schools and colleges, promoting recruitment and on-going education. If a general conclusion can be drawn from these sessions, the Association has come a long way very quickly – from very little to more than 4,000 members and with our own magazine and exhibition. However, future major developments such as a site for our own practical and technical training – although already much discussed – currently await funding beyond our present resources.

On the social side, a splendid Christmas dinner was launched by 'Santa' doing Lance Percival impressions and dishing-out Iseki stationery. Many members may recognise the 'face behind the beard' from this brief description – and those who can't probably don't want to! A welcome guest was our chairman, George Malcolm, who spoke after the meal and thanked all involved with running BIGGA. We were also, thanks to Jane, privy to George's views on whisky and women (no preference expressed!). The evening concluded with an impromptu pool competition for small stakes, in which the Leicestershire greenkeepers demonstrated their tenacity wherever money is involved. Well done Roger Willars! (the writer was a disappointed second).

Before leaving Aldwark Manor, an hour was set aside for an 'open forum'. The officers of the Association were keen to hear any views passed on by members (for example difficulties in obtaining BIGGA garments), from which good will hopefully result. It was the general feeling that the meeting was worthwhile, not only for the exchange of information between HQ and sections, but also for the informal discussions between representatives on how different sections are run. Why not, indeed, make this an annual event?

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