

In his opening speech to the membership, Executive Director NEIL THOMAS was in buoyant mood in reporting a year of sustained growth and development, one in which BIGGA made a 'significant impact' in the UK...

ANNUAL REPORT

THE YEAR OF 1991 began in fine style with the now well-established West-urf, and though marred this time by poor weather it did little to dampen spirits. This show meets a real local need in the West and continues to attract both enthusiasm from the region and from those traders who rightly see it as a valuable shop window. Every credit, then, to Gordon Child and his energetic team.

The Iseki Tournament was a huge success, continuing to cement relationships at regional level and culminating with triumph at the wonderful final staged at Hillside. Members were unanimous in praising this fine course and echoed the view that the Iseki event is one that would be sorely missed should it cease to be staged. As members know, Colin Gregory was the driving force behind Iseki and he has now moved to pastures new. That stated, we will make every effort to ensure the continuance of this tournament, which has been a cornerstone of greenkeeper golf since 1988.

The Open Championship at Royal Birkdale in July was a time when favourable comment was voiced for our support team, suggesting that both in appearance and conduct our professional image was greatly enhanced.

For the National Tournament to be staged at Royal St David's in August it was a personal thrill and gave considerable pleasure to welcome those who had never crossed the border. They were not disappointed, for the event was voted by many as the best ever, culminating in a grand banquet and Welsh choir in full voice! A stunning few days for which we cannot thank ICI Professional Products enough in providing support and active participation.

As we moved towards autumn, there was a marked increase in activity beginning with the Ransomes International staged at Fulford. In October came the annual Kubota Challenge at the Belfry, an event in which the Greenkeepers have won six times out of nine – this year we defeated the EGU by eight matches to nil! Your Board sees a need to broaden the basis of selection for such events, which need to be used to promote the Association as well as the playing of golf. It has been decided to widen selection away from just results in the National Tournament and although golfing ability will be a consideration, regions will now be asked to nominate one member of the team both as a golfer and ambassador. This will provide five of the team, which will be completed with the overall nett winners at the National Tournament and Iseki Final,

together with a personal nominee of the chairman.

Autumn sees three major educational events centred on Aldwark. The Toro 'Student Greenkeeper of the Year' Award gave us a most worthy winner in Brian Story of Silloth on Solway. This is an Award Scheme which stimulates much interest and competition and can only be for the good of greenkeeper training generally. The ICI 'Greenkeeper of the Year' Award went to David Whitaker of Wisley and he was a most worthy winner given the developments at Wisley during 1991. David proved an excellent ambassador at the recent GCSAA Conference and Show in New Orleans. October and November saw five weeks of Management Courses running and representing the major element of our in-house training programme. It is a fact that many greenkeepers are inhibited in terms of attending college and the courses are a welcome alternative. Aldwark is ideal for courses of both practical and theoretical nature and one can foresee a growth in the future.

As we moved to the turn of the year all roads pointed to Harrogate and the BTME. The Exhibition and Seminar programme at Harrogate is the focal point of our year. The industry has supported the exhibition since its inception and it is of major importance to BIGGA's finances. The industry in supporting our exhibition has a right to expect the Association members to support its own exhibition. We have a lot going for us at Harrogate – this year's event was without doubt an outstanding success and it is fast becoming the premier event within the industry – so make sure that its future is not jeopardised by apathy and non-participation.

Much interest was expressed at the GCSAA Conference and Show in New Orleans in magazine subscriptions, membership and the BTME. The presence of BIGGA on an international stage is important as greenkeeping develops worldwide and whilst we now enjoy fine relationships with the US, Canadian and Swedish Associations, there is a clear need to consolidate our position in Europe where many greenkeeping associations are still in their embryo stages.

Coming to the National Education Conference at Cirencester, this has most certainly become a prestige conference and, like Harrogate, a focal point in our year. For the first time a sell-out occurred with a number of latecomers disappointed. The lecture programme is complemented by much greenkeeper debate and each year it is noticeable how many attendees return home enthused for the future of the profession.

Whilst the major events, awards, exhibition and conferences have undoubtedly further advanced the Association, much developmental

work has been undertaken both within the Association and through participation in wider developments throughout the game. We currently have thirteen approved colleges with over 1,000 students on Craft Level courses and a number of colleges running a Phase III – Supervisory course and some also a Phase IV Management course. During the last three years BIGGA has seen the need for higher qualifications, specifically HND/Degree level courses. Recently the first submission for an HND in Golf Greenkeeping was received for our observations and another is pending. The first HND course will be up and running at Cannington College this year. Demand will ultimately determine the need for such courses, but I would suggest that initially no more than two in England and one in Scotland would be the optimum need. In Scotland five colleges are working jointly to establish an HNC course as a forerunner to a full HND course. Progress is being sustained and this will further enhance the high standards that prevail in Scotland. Greenkeeping as a career is becoming attractive but it will only capture the interest and imagination of future generations if it can offer sound training up to and including degree level courses. This must be our aim and we will be encouraging the various bodies to support the system and concentrate resources through the approved colleges.

Work is advanced on the preparation of a greenkeeper training manual, commissioned by the GTC. This is being compiled by a Working Party with a major input from the approved colleges. Initial concentration is at craft level before moving onto supervisory and management levels. BIGGA is represented on the Lead Body for Amenity Horticulture and this manual will become the basis for National Vocational Qualifications in greenkeeping. BIGGA is actively involved in establishing NVQs for the profession and the NVQ system will play an important role in answering national training needs and in enabling individuals to develop their potential to the full.

Much is happening educationally – maintaining the momentum of progress will not be possible unless significant advances are made in financing courses and training programmes.

Two pence remains the princely sum (per member) collected by the Home Unions and paid annually to the GTC – yes, just 2p goes into greenkeeper education and training. Last year this produced a sum of £16,042 which was matched by the R&A. In addition a £5,000 contribution was received from the PGA European Tour. £37,000 then is the sum currently available to assist in the education and training of greenkeepers. Over and above this we are dependent on sponsorship and BIGGA's own resources to run

award schemes and courses. Financially, it's a sorry state of affairs but there may be some hope not too far ahead, emanating from 'The Way Forward', last year saw the formation of the Joint Golf Course Committee (JGCC). BIGGA supports the new structure – quite simply it has to be made to work if desperately needed resources are to be made available for education, training and research purposes. Regrettably from our view, the new structure has not got off to an auspicious start and there is a clear need for an end to the prevailing 'politics' along with a united approach if the new structure is to offer lasting benefits to both education programmes and much needed research within the game.

In terms of education and training, let me conclude on positive notes. It is pleasing to report that the presentation of the first Master Greenkeeper Certificate was made by Viscount Whitelaw at BTME. It is not easy to obtain, and let no-one doubt that the award indicates that the recipient has achieved the highest standards of excellence within the profession of greenkeeping. At the outset of the Association in 1987, BIGGA signified its intent to make education a number one priority and without any doubt the best exemplification of BIGGA carrying out its intent is the MGC. Many golf Clubs are now aware of and understand the Scheme – this is very important – and our experience indicates that they will support those employees who set out to obtain the Certificate. Club responses to BIGGA plans and programmes have generally been positive. However, there is evidence that for every greenkeeper who complains that his Club will not support his education, there are probably two or three Club secretaries who will say that they haven't been asked and were they asked would willingly support the staff concerned.

At the end of 1991, it was pleasing to announce that our numbers now exceed 4,000, giving us a strong membership base though with no room for complacency. For whatever reasons we lose some 500 members each year. It is quite true that we are on a growth curve because the number of new members each year exceed that figure. Perhaps this is normal, with members leaving the industry and being replaced. That being the case, there are still large numbers who are not members. If every member went out and brought one fellow greenkeeper into membership just think of the impact.

Membership of the Association brings many pleasures and benefits – it also brings obligations. Members abide by a Code of Ethics, but I sense that this Code lies dormant in most files. Our Constitution states that 'After five years from the inception of the Association, each full member shall be required, when

attending a formal national occasion, to dress in tie and jacket of the Association and to follow the guidelines on shoes, slacks and shirt'. January 1992 has now passed and we are some way from achieving this – look no further than the recent Iseki or Ransomes Tournaments for proof. Since 1987 we have sought to present our members professionally at such events, with BIGGA sweaters and shirts provided and on occasions blazers and ties have been lent. The Constitution must now be implemented. Greenkeepers have made great strides in presenting themselves professionally but there is still some way to go – even now we are talking of perhaps only 20% who take pride in their appearance with some 80% adopting a laissez faire approach to the detriment of themselves and their Association.

1991 proved a good year – the first good year – for our magazine since 1987. Its content and presentation have been widely applauded throughout the industry whilst there has been a constant effort to improve and to reflect the needs of the profession. We do not have chosen a **h a r d e r** year, in the midst of recession, to bring the magazine in-house. The industry has remained supportive and levels of advertising have been sustained – this augurs well for the future. We are in a highly competitive business and the magazine has to be run on strict commercial lines. This is happening and we are more than maintaining our own.

I have mentioned the industry and out there many companies who have historically supported the profession are experiencing very hard times. The great majority recognise the benefits of on-going relationships with individual greenkeepers and with our sections. It is in many ways a small and closely-knit industry where everyone knows everyone and amidst the competitive rivalry, a camaraderie exists. Many greenkeepers are at ease with company reps and pressure selling is rare and generally unwelcome by our members. At National level we benefit from a small number of sponsorship agreements, primarily aimed at pro-

moting the education and training of greenkeepers. Those agreements are very welcome and I would suggest mutually beneficial. They generally work well and over a period of three years have stood the test of time. The danger we face is of some companies perceiving others gaining benefit from their relationship with the Association to their exclusion and in time this could have a polarising effect. The launching of the new Education and Development Fund marks another significant advance for the Association. Financial contributions will now channel the resources of the game and the industry into one central fund which will enable the promotion and financing of educational programmes, scholarship awards and training aids for the benefit of the greenkeeping profession. The enhancement of knowledge and technical expertise will in turn lead to higher standards of course management.

Nearly five years on we can stand up and be proud of our achievements. Yet there is much to be done. We must start by examining critically where we are falling down before criticising others. Our biggest problem can be summed up in one word – apathy – the apathy of members particularly in seeking educational betterment. Whilst this can be seen as a product of past attitudes within Clubs, many of our members really do need to wake up to opportunities now becoming available. Many of them lack the confidence to pursue those opportunities having in the past adopted the traditional role of knowing their place. Our Management Courses are designed to instil the self-confidence needed to march into the secretary's office and make a case for financial support in the pursuit of training and qualifications. The pendulum is swinging and we can no longer wholly apportion the blame to reactionary and narrow-minded golf club committees. Again there is fear – fear of the agronomist; of the club secretary; of the green committee; of change and of the unknown. It is debilitating, insidious and can be career-long. Greenkeepers should have nothing to fear and here we get to the heart of the matter. Such

fear will only be overcome through involvement – in education, with BIGGA and in interaction with fellow greenkeepers. That is the way ahead.

Golf in the United Kingdom is now a wealthy game – that is undeniable. The distribution of that wealth is totally out of proportion. At the top end is the pro tour generating vast sums of money, but adopting an insular approach and seemingly showing little concern for the development of the game as a whole. As we go down the scale we bottom out with junior golf and the Association constantly seeking funding and support. If support is not forthcoming what future lies ahead for the golfing stars of tomorrow and what will be the quality of the golf courses on which they play? The work of the new JGCC will be substantial, it must address key issues and the solutions it puts forward will have fundamental effects on the future of the game in the UK.

There is no doubt that the game is now demanding ever higher standards in course maintenance and presentation – it is the technically experienced course manager who will best be able to meet the required standards. In turn he will be rewarded by a more realistic assessment of necessary salary levels within the profession. We can view the future optimistically – there are now tremendous job opportunities, but for those obtaining these top positions there will need to be more study and application, as well as a grasping of opportunity. This way lies the path to success.

The demands made on greenkeepers today never cease to amaze me. The depth of technical knowledge needed to be successful in the profession is extensive and ever increasing. There are heavy physical demands. There is still much ignorance on the part of Club committees and members to be tolerated and overcome each day. I stand committed to improving the position of greenkeepers and the greenkeeping profession and BIGGA will not be deterred in taking the profession forward to its rightful place at the forefront of the game – when all is said and done the most important employees of any golf Club are the greenkeeping staff.

Finally, my special and sincere thanks to our chairman, George Malcolm, for all he has achieved during his year of office. I have enjoyed his steadfast support during the year and no-one should be in any doubt of the extent to which George has promoted the Association. On behalf of you all, I conclude by thanking George for all he has done and achieved.



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