

A Greenkeeper International tribute to supporters of the Greenkeeper Education and Development Fund.

Number 3: STEPHEN FELL, Lindum Seeded Turf



Stephen Fell, the chief executive of HR Fell & Sons Limited, a long established family agricultural business of which Lindum Seeded Turf is the turf production and marketing arm, is a man of many parts, or perhaps to put it more accurately, many careers.

What most would be delighted to have crammed into a lifetime, Stephen seems to have crammed in within just a few short years, and whilst it would be every young man's dream to travel extensively whilst carving a career, each of Stephen's sorties to far flung corners of the globe, undergoing many different though essentially agriculturally related tasks, has neatly and successfully dove-tailed into his earning a living, with a clear cut path of progression emerging.

To understand more of Stephen as the turfgrass businessman however, one perhaps must look at the family connection, in particular the paternal influence of his father, Henry Fell, who is chairman of the company and a Fellow of the Royal Agricultural Society. Henry is a Council Member of the Royal Agricultural Society and is well known and highly respected in both British and European agriculture. Add this to the fact that the company is managed personally by members of the Fell family, each playing an important part in the overall success of the business, and it seems to logically follow that Stephen has enjoyed a guiding influence from an early age and that his present task of chief executive can be seen to have followed a very logical path indeed.

Stephen himself is a Member of the Royal Agricultural College, having taken a Diploma in Rural Estate Management in 1975 and is also a Chartered Surveyor, qualifying in 1977. He worked as a surveyor with ADAS in Durham, essentially involved in land use and open cast reclamation and also managed a farm in Limoges in France for four years. He was estates manager at the large country estate in Kent of Robin Leigh-Pemberton, taking control of farming, forestry and property management for nine years and as previously noted, he has travelled extensively both as a Nuffield Scholar in the Antipodes and then studied turf technology in Australia, the United States and, of course, throughout Britain.

As one might expect, Stephen is in love with the countryside, though one could never call him a rabid conservationist in the now accepted sense. No, for that would mean he was anti golf courses, anti developments, anti growth and anti progress in a golfing sense and certainly anti diversification – and that is clearly not his line. To appreciate his philosophy, we can do no better than extract segments of his recent address to the BIGGA Education Conference at Cirencester, in which he talked of an awareness of big golfing projects that have failed, loan capital that has all but dried up and of speculators going bust and hurting others in the process. No one knows more than Stephen how hard the media has been on golf recently and of the hostility of the environmental lobby.

From all this doom and gloom, Stephen emerges as the eternal optimist, well aware that



AN OPTIMIST AND A REALIST

if the need for 300 new courses in the next three years is met, this will mean a demand for turf and seed – and also at least 300 new greenkeepers! His optimism is coloured with more than a touch of realism in seeing that with the decline in farming fortunes has come the general farmer who suddenly thinks that turf must be a profitable enterprise. Armed with only a thin veneer of expertise the new farmer/turf grower has cast his net into muddy water and therein, warns Stephen, lies the problem, with turf grown on a whole range of soils, nearly all of them incompatible with the rootzone mixes on your greens and tees. He further warns that greenkeepers should be vigilant in seeking out only fine turf grown on stone free sands such as are found only around York, in North Lincolnshire between Caister and Market Rasen, and near Woodbridge in Suffolk. Don't be deluded, he says, for on soils other than those highlighted the growers are on suspect territory and one should not be led astray by their doubtful cut price products.

Turning a moment from the man to his company – Lindum Seeded Turf – it is well known that Lindum are avid supporters of BIGGA and their education cause, and for the past two years they have sponsored our National Education Conference and contributed in many varied ways, all geared toward making the lot of the greenkeeper a better one. They believe that efficient golf course management and country conservation are compatible and are actively involved in negotiations for the setting up of a nationwide wildlife and conservation management programme at an affordable price. Why do Lindum want this? Quite simply because they see the need developing if not being forced upon the industry and feel that the service would fit well within Lindum's

current portfolio of services and products. How would it work? Through a network of 42 advisors (16 in Scotland) who are mostly graduates and all experienced in ecology and conservation management. The service is envisaged as taking the form of a visit from a local advisor, one well acquainted with the type of habitat and indigenous species, and the production of a written appraisal to include highlighting areas of specific interest, outlining recommendations for future management and providing information on possible grant aid that may be available. Follow up visits would be available and on course half day training sessions with several greenkeepers from one area are envisaged.

Lindum may well be in the business of supplying fine turf, as their list of clients bears witness, including such internationally famous courses as Gleneagles, Royal Birkdale and Wentworth, but they are also in the business of preserving the environment, of maintaining excellent course aesthetics. In short, they have their finger on the pulse of nature.

In describing Stephen Fell earlier as a turfgrass businessman, the picture fell short of describing the man totally, for he is a naturalist, a man with a feeling for the beauty of the land, one who is friends with the countryside and one who believes that a well designed golf course should be a celebration of nature. All this in a modern business with a long standing policy to major on quality and to use only the very best STRI approved varieties grown on light sand to ensure fast establishment and bonding on the customers prepared site. The latest technology is available to Lindum and this ensures that these quality standards are consistently maintained and that confidence in their products is never questioned.