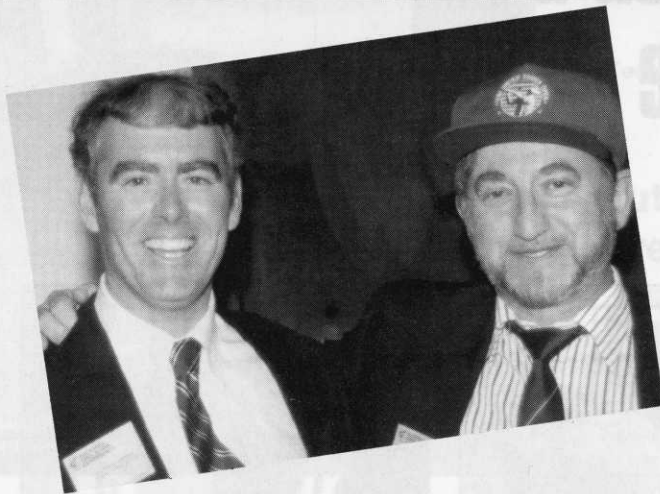


## DAVID WHITE, reporting on an ambitious BIGGA National Education Conference, discovers how the learning process can be inspirational – and even fun

Three days of incarceration in a college theatre is not the sort of thing too many greenkeepers would wish upon themselves, but the whisper that became a roar – that BIGGA conferences are somewhat different – was out, and on the occasion of the Lindum Seeded Turf sponsored BIGGA Education Conference staged at the inspired seat of learning, Cirencester Agricultural College, delegates were unanimous in declaring three days as not nearly enough! Time and again one would hear comments that this was the best conference yet, that there was so much to learn, that they wished it might go on longer, and (with not a little touch of pride) that the greenkeepers had the professionals licked into a cocked hat in terms of both material and presentation! It was magic stuff and did much to bolster self esteem in a profession that is clearly on a rapidly rising curve.

Certainly the ambitious programme covering seventeen presentations from no less than fourteen speakers called for slick adherence to timing, and although on this occasion our able chairman Gordon Child was minus his red light warning, his skill in running a tight ship was again evident – we'll award him ten out of ten for efficiency!

One way to win instant acclaim is to tell an audience something they want to hear, and Tom Cook began on a high note by stating in his presentation 'Can we maintain pure bentgrass putting turf in cool temperate climates' that the answer was a categorical NO! In truth, he covered all angles by maintaining that in parts of the USA he believed the answer was yes, and continued by explaining why bentgrass failed, revealing that in no less than 450 courses in Oregon and Washington (climate similar to Britain) there were no 20 year old courses with pure bentgrass greens, probably fewer than 20 mature courses with more than 50% bentgrass on greens



**Top: Delegates gathered in the lecture theatre, below, an Anglo-American exchange – Patrick O'Brien from the USGA Green Section gains the benefit of Jon Allbutt's knowledge, Jon Allbutt gains... a US Open cap. Above, from left, Bernard Findlay, Carol Borthwick and Geoff Hodson.**

and the average green in this region was probably yielding 80-95% Poa annua. The rogues in this equation were revealed as over zealous use of water and surface disturbance.

It would take the length of a novel to report thoroughly on every aspect of the conference, the reader therefore must be content with this overall picture spanning many hours of presentation, whilst appre-

ciating that some of the papers may form future features within Greenkeeper International. Thus I will mention without comment the presentation given by Dr Neil Baldwin of the STRI on 'Integrated disease management', the talk on 'Project management compared with normal golf course construction contracts' by Jonathan Gaunt, the insight into 'Greenkeeping in Norway' given by

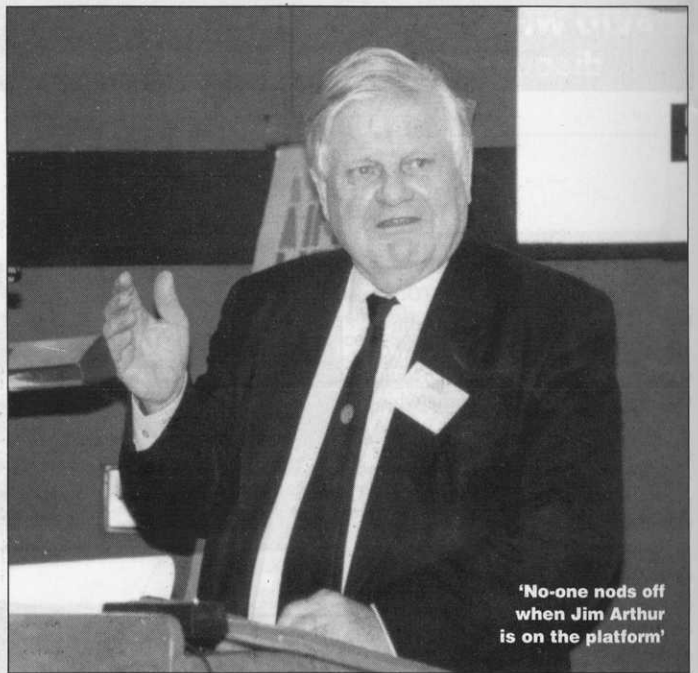
Tor Senstadt, and Gordon Jaaback's presentation on 'Limitations in root-zone design', not to dismiss them but rather to concentrate on the first of a trio of head greenkeeper presentations, that of Royal Liverpool's Derek Green on 'Dry Patch'.

Derek told in his typical droll humoured style of the 180 hydrophobic acres on the links of Hoylake, with some 50-60% of Dry Patch on any one green which appeared in a mosaic pattern. Some of the worst affected areas at Hoylake, we learned, were in roughs and sand dunes which had never been treated with anything. The theory was suggested that Dry Patch might be caused or exacerbated by sand top dressing applications, necessary with increased play, though Derek was at pains to point out that his links greens were not pure sand, rather a 80-20 mix with dirty sand and crushed shell. Dry Patch at Hoylake was certainly no recent phenomenon either, for old records revealed that the problems were first noted back in 1920. Derek told an amusing tale of the investigative work undertaken by the STRI, when he jokingly suggested that at one time it seemed they were taking so many samples that his fear was that an upcoming tournament might well be played over 15 greens at Hoylake and 3 at Bingley! Thus far, he told us, no positive results have come from these experiments, though of course he remains optimistic.

To round off our first day, Jim Arthur presented a paper on 'Drainage, before and after construction', this originally scheduled for delivery by his indisposed old friend, Barry Cooper. Although Jim delivered Barry's piece word perfect, he could not, of course, resist the temptation to spice the contents with his own invaluable reminiscences and observations – pure vintage Arthur of the finest quality which nicely rounded off the official proceedings, though shop → 14

# UNMISSABLE

# It was magic stuff and did much to bolster self esteem in a profession on a rising curve



'No-one nods off when Jim Arthur is on the platform'

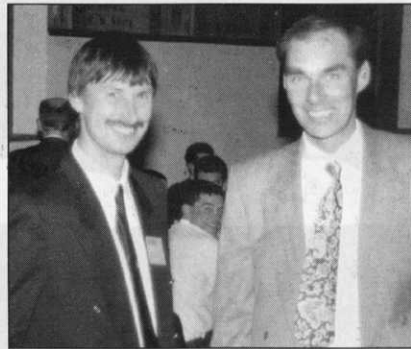
13 → talk continued well into the small hours!

Jon Allbutt is well known to our readers as both author and presenter of no-nonsense information relating to spraying, pesticides, codes of practice, COSHH regulations and the like. Delegates might have been forgiven for thinking beforehand that his subject, 'Using chemicals on the course and complying with the law', was as dry as dust, but the man is a veritable wizard in making presentations not only interesting but fascinating. Thus we enjoyed forty minutes of Jon, whilst learning of the perils that lurk in failing to comply with the law. One wag was heard to whisper, 'he could make a 'phone book sound exciting', and indeed this was the case, a hard act to follow.

That Stephen Fell, managing director of Lindum Seeded Turf, was able to follow Jon with aplomb is to be applauded, for his paper on 'Course aesthetics, good, bad and indifferent' was delivered with sound professionalism and gave delegates much food for thought – indeed this obviously wasn't Stephen's first time on the podium at Cirencester, for he is a graduate of the Royal Agricultural College, having majored in Estate Management in 1975.

Learning more of 'The development of education programmes for the greenkeeping profession in the USA' was our next major presentation, delivered by William Roberts, president of the GCSAA, and followed by Carol Borthwick asking 'Where do we go from here?'. Carol is no newcomer to the lecture room, though in wielding a mashie niblick to give emphasis to her talk, she gave a whole new meaning to the school marm edict 'pay attention!'

We all knew where we were  
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From left, Gordon Child, our chairman, greenkeeping experts David Whitaker and Laurence Pithie, and Tommy Lindelof, representing Golfium AB, Sweden

going from here', making our way to a luncheon room that buzzed with informed comment and bulged with good food – a splendid break thoroughly deserved by speakers and delegates alike.

Laurence Pithie is so well known and well informed that there was no need to persuade delegates to return to the lecture theatre to listen to our first 'Master Greenkeeper'. Laurence spiced an altogether fascinating talk with his own highly professional slide presentation in talking of 'Golf course development' from his own individualistic viewpoint, enlivened the proceedings with shots of course construction disasters that would make Harry Colt turn in his grave.

Like the good trooper he is, Pat O'Brien of the USGA Green Section finally made Cirencester some 24 hours late, having been stuck on the ferry between Ireland and the mainland overnight, and though his talk on 'Bentgrass management in the south eastern USA' was covered, his thrust was interspersed with so many anecdotes that he had the gathering in stitches of laughter, a natural comedian who could always get a job as an entertainer should his agronomy career falter! He was later to continue in like vein with

his 'Ten best all-time tips of the USGA Green Section' – hugely entertaining and rewarding.

The finale of Saturday was left to the irrepressible Jim Arthur, this time with Jim shunning all notes in presenting his 'Sound traditional greenkeeping practices versus gimmicks'. The one predictable thing about Jim is that he is unpredictable, though he always enjoys ruffling a few feathers and never shuns controversy, especially aiming at those of the 'don't rock the boat' brigade. Indeed this occasion was no exception with his sound condemnation of the gimmick, and love him or hate him one could not fail to be impressed by his huge font of knowledge properly earned in the field, his forthright delivery leaving no-one in doubt as to his message – no-one nods off when Jim is on the platform!

The lecture day ending on a high, delegates later dining in splendid style in the imposing banquet hall and feted by a sleight of hand comedian who was uncanny in his polished routine. Indeed, in these days of smut and innuendo it was refreshing to be so perfectly entertained without a scrap of bad language – more of the same, please!

Came the finale, and it was with

Bernard Findlay, course manager at Portstewart Golf Club, that the seal of excellence was finally set. I will purposely refrain from exposing his stunning presentation, for this will be a major feature within our pages in the near future, but I can reveal that Bernard has actually built a seaside links course from scratch, has the scars to prove it, the pictures to back up his experiences, and tells a tale of such interest that you will all want to visit Portstewart to see the course for yourself. Bernard began the day as a greenhorn presenter, modestly murmuring about his inexperience and finished as the star of our conference, a perfect role model for other greenkeepers – indeed all platform presenters – to follow in the future. That BIGGA can produce such worthy speakers from within the ranks is a great credit to the profession and augurs well for the future of both greenkeeping and the National Education Conference of 1993. Incidentally, should the success of Derek, Laurence and Bernard spark off the inclination in others to become public speakers (see Page 12 of the April issue), they could do no better than attend a two-day specialist course at HQ Give David Golding a call on 03473 581.