

Brian's



DAVID WHITE
talks to another
supporter of
**BIGGA's Education
and Development
Fund, Kubota's
BRIAN HURTLEY**

When I first began to write about greenkeepers and greenkeeping my attention was inexorably drawn to the activities of Kubota UK Limited by a clever marketing ploy known as the Kubota Challenge. This, I was constantly reminded, was *the* match play team event, one in which every golfing greenkeeper nursed aspirations to represent their Association, playing over the world famous Belfry Brabazon course, site of Ryder Cup inspirations.

The Kubota Challenge was the inspiration of Sporting Concepts director, Peter McEvoy, though undoubtedly it soon became the personal darling of Brian Hurtley, Kubota UK's vice president and director. It was he who recognised immediately the potential for bringing together those who would appreciate Kubota's innovative machinery and sing its praises, albeit in a soft-sell situation.

First, quite naturally, came the greenkeepers: the practical men who know what they want and can recommend what is best – the end users. Next, those who have the power to specify and place orders, the golf club secretaries. Those who by virtue of their position in the higher echelons of golf can talk about innovative machinery are represented in the guise of EGU officials; and those who raise funds for the common good of golf are represented by the Golf Foundation. Kubota are involved additionally with the Golf Foundation – providing a tractor as a major prize – and huge sums

of money are raised for the Foundation by clubs around the country. It is a smart concept and identifies the company through charitable sporting links.

What is even more important, perhaps, is that BIGGA's golfing representatives have won the Kubota Challenge six times in nine years, a wonderful way in which our Association may blow its own public relations trumpet!

Those in greenkeeping know Kubota as the manufacturer of tractors; implements; attachments for golf course maintenance, and of many OEM Kubota petrol and diesel engines that power other makers machinery under separate trademarks. This is an important part of the company's British activity but there is much more, including construction machinery; excavators; pumps, generators and the like. World-wide the company are involved in pipeline for the supply and water industries; irrigation supply systems; vending machines and home utilities, to name but a few.

The subject of this sketch, Brian Hurtley, may well have become a pilot, for he had a yearning to fly and in 1948 joined the RAF with that goal in mind. Disappointingly for him his timing was a year or two adrift, for the authorities decided that navigators were in greater demand and his aspirations were thwarted. Aircraft navigation, he decided, was not his forte and he returned to civilian life and the continuation of his former career in the civil service.

Born of an Australian father, Brian had long aspired to travel to the Antipodes and an opportunity arose for him to transfer into the New Zealand public service. Cutting a long

GOLF CONSTRUCTION XXIV

In a world of constant change, it's refreshing to know that sometimes things are best left alone.

Members of the British Association of Golf Course Constructors know just when to leave things unchanged, or when change is required or becomes inevitable, just how to go about it with an eye to detail and a truly professional approach.

After all, why change what has become a successful formula established over many years based on the unique and wide ranging experience of our XXIV member companies.

If you're in need of a company with a proven track record of building fine golf courses, contact the BAGCC:

**Tim Banks, The Secretary,
2 Angel Court, Dairy Yard,
Market Harborough, Leicestershire LE16 7NL**

Tel: (0858) 464346 and 433003. Fax: (0858) 434734



Challenge

story short, it was whilst studying for further accountancy qualifications that a grand chance presented itself – he was offered ‘double the pay’ to join the man who was training him! Brian recalled how his departure from the NZ Treasury Department was viewed with dismay and of his being summoned before the Prime Minister of New Zealand to explain his impending departure! For a young man searching for identity and new horizons it was a daunting moment, but he followed his convictions and became an accountant with JC Hutton, one of New Zealand’s largest meat packing concerns.

There was always a nagging doubt that accountancy – the desk-bound life – was not for him and soon the nag became a conviction: he had to get out and work under the beautiful blue skies, to feel free and unhampered.

What followed was a spell of various carefree tasks: stevedore; tobacco picker; painter; general handyman et cetera – indeed almost anything that brought in cash. Brian declares that he had then a need to get something out of his system and the desire to travel was uppermost. He signed on as a steward aboard ship, sailed around the North and South Islands, Tonga, Samoa and Fiji, and spent many glorious voyages working alongside folk of many nationalities. “I found I could communicate well with all of my fellow workers”, he told me, “irrespective of race. This has stood me in good stead in my understanding of and working with people of different cultures – the Japanese, for example”.

Family bereavement caused Brian to return to the UK and in 1955 he joined Massey-Ferguson. His earlier skills acquired in matters financial were used to good effect and eventually he became General Financial Forecasting Manager, Massey-Ferguson Ltd, bringing together their annual business plans.

Further progress followed when he joined M-F’s main distributor – Eastern Tractors – as financial director. Through this, Brian became involved on the product side more and was charged eventually with the task of travelling to Africa, ostensibly to set up a subsidiary company and sell second-hand tractors in The Gambia, a developing nation. Though the idea was to sell larger M-F tractors, the need soon identified was not for leviathans, rather for compact tractors of the Kubota type. Brian’s skill in putting together a package of tractor; trailer; plough, harrow and so on – essentially based on Kubota’s compact range – proved successful with young Africans, who found the ease of operating such equipment to their liking. More important, their work was basic by western standards, often small paddy field operations, and the Kubota range proved a huge mechanical step-up from oxen or hand ploughs.

Brian’s task in The Gambia was never intended to be permanent and he travelled back and forth every three months to oversee the whole operation – transportation; distribution; dealer networks; hiring; training and ensuring an adequate spares network was in place and operating smoothly. As events transpired, Eastern Tractors were taken over by the Cowie Group and there was no place for a duplication of directors – Brian included – and thus came the necessity for him to seek new opportunities.

In life it isn’t always a case of being in the right place at the right time, but if you’ve the right background – an in-depth knowledge of distribution coupled with a financial background -wheels will run more smoothly. Approached in 1980 by Kubota’s UK managing director, Brian joined the company and quickly utilised his expertise in establishing a sound dealer network – he knew from past experience what proved attractive to dealers; how to set up training programmes, how to motivate a powerful sales force. He was



Brian Hurtle – one of BIGGA’s most ardent supporters

instrumental in recognising untapped potential, in perhaps turning Kubota’s attention in the UK away from the traditional agricultural use of tractors and moving toward the fine turf industry. Now some thirteen successful years down the road, Brian points proudly to the fact that there are dealers clamouring to get a piece of the action.

If all this seems too simplistic, it is merely because limited space cannot permit a blow by blow account of Brian’s success story. That stated, the casual visitor to the Thame headquarters of Kubota cannot fail but be impressed by the sheer efficiency of Brian’s operation. Everything is squeaky clean, computers abound on almost every desk, the place a quiet nerve-centre for a hugely successful marketing and distribution operation. Following Kubota’s own creed ‘Technology for the Needs of Tomorrow’ is the ambition of everyone at Kubota – and they are realising this goal.

This short portrait would be incomplete without reference to the BIGGA/Kubota connection. Brian is one of BIGGA’s most ardent supporters, his company fully endorsing this support in a practical way. Such endorsement has come by financially assisting – from the very onset of our greenkeeper training ideology – the management programmes run at Aldwark Manor. The Kubota Challenge has always been seen as a promotion in which greenkeepers play a major role and Brian, having over nine years known and negotiated with BGGGA, SIGGA and EIGGA, records his pleasure at the coming together of these various factions in forming BIGGA – highly respected, very professional, and enhancing the status of greenkeepers everywhere.

One disappointment – he wishes that all greenkeepers were members of our organisation and suggests that perhaps overall strength will come through powerful regions and by those prepared to give freely of their time for the common good.