

AGM Report



BIGGA can look back on only a short history, but it is a period marked by progress and accomplishment. 1992 was no exception and confirmed the sharply rising curve in BIGGA's development which was apparent the previous year. So much happens in the Association that it is difficult to compress the detail into a report such as this. I will, however, look back over the year and then highlight the issues and concerns which face us in 1993 and beyond.

Our AGM traditionally precedes Westurf and this is now a well-established and eagerly anticipated regional event in the south-west. It meets a local need and in acknowledging the input of the regional board to the event, members of that board will be the first to acknowledge how much the event's success owes to Gordon and Marion Child. Its impact locally is great but it also contributes to BIGGA's status as a whole.

By May, the fifth and final Iseki Tournament was well into its qualifying stages and at the final at Coventry Golf Club in September, a well-presented golf course made for an exciting final and the usual keen contest for the Regional Prize. The banquet was tinged with some sadness with Iseki's decision to end their sponsorship of the event. One sensed a genuine regret amongst Iseki's staff at the decision, but we can all look back on five excellent years and a period which most certainly established the event as the premier regional tournament: bringing sections together on a regional basis which, members will recall, was the original aim in setting it up.

At last year's AGM I assured members that every effort would be made to ensure the continuance of the tournament, which since 1988 had done so much to cement member relationships at a regional level, and at the end of the year it was a particular pleasure to announce a successful conclusion to discussions with Hayters for that company to take over sponsorship of the event, to be known henceforth as the Hayter Challenge Tournament. Already it seems clear that there will be a gradual upgrading of the tournament and we can look forward optimistically to the 1993 event and beyond.

In July, The Open took us to Muirfield. Much praise was forthcoming for the course preparation by Chris Whittle and his team and this set the tone for a highly successful week. It is very much a week when the Association is 'on show' and our support team most certainly has a job to do which I believe is done with the right mixture of professionalism, hard work and enjoyment. It is not an easy event to organise from the Association's viewpoint and patience and diplomacy are often necessary on the part of the Association's officers, officials and support team. The input at regional level is important to the success of our participation and our thanks are due to the experienced (I was going to say veteran) Scottish team for their sterling efforts. It is an immensely enjoyable week and does much to enhance BIGGA's



BIGGA is respected as a professional body that knows where it is going...

- Executive director NEIL THOMAS

image. We look forward to Royal St Georges, when the logistical problems will be greater than usual, but with an experienced team on hand I am sure that we can anticipate another successful week.

In August, the National Tournament took us to the farthest reaches of Kent - to the Littlestone Golf Club. Here we enjoyed a hugely warm and relaxed welcome. The wind blew and blew but the competitors persevered. The South East region had put much preparation into the event and ran a successful race night in the marquee, followed by a first class banquet. This event represents a tradition going back over many years and an annual reunion for many members. It is always good however to see fresh faces each year and we now look forward to traditional Scottish hospitality at Dunbar this coming August.

In mentioning the South East region

involvement, one cannot talk of this without mention of Norman Exley. The March edition of 'Greenkeeper International' has written of his life and work on behalf of the Association. I would just add quite simply at a personal level that he was a good friend for whom nothing on behalf of the Association was too much trouble. We all recognised his many qualities and he will be sadly missed.

Soon we were into the busy autumn period and the annual Kubota Challenge at the Belfry. This year brought another triumph for our team, albeit by the narrowest of margins. Members will recall that the Board changed the basis of team selection for the 1992 event and this resulted in an unfortunate reaction from a number of members during the National Tournament. The matter was subsequently referred back to the regional boards for consideration and the responses received were heavily in favour of the new selection method, which the Board has since confirmed will continue. I would urge members wishing to register their concerns to do so in the democratic manner, which our constitution allows through their sections, regions and subsequently to Board level. The petition which was raised did not reflect well on the Association and although it did not subsequently threaten our enjoyment of Littlestone, it could well have proved an unnecessary embarrassment to the Association.

The Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Award entered its fourth year and we had a most worthy winner in Barry Neville of Oaklands College. This award is set to expand this year with seven regional finals covering thirty-six colleges now entitled to enter students at Phase II Level II Craft level. The ICI Premier Greenkeeper of the Year Award went to Ian Harrison of Darlington and the final at Aldwark Manor produced fierce competition. Unfortunately the membership did not support the preliminary stages and we are very grateful to ICI Professional Products (henceforth to be known as Zeneca) for their continued support in 1993. Last year's problems have been addressed and it is pleasing to report a far greater level of interest than at the corresponding period last year.

Through October and November we again ran our successful Management Courses, this time extended to six weeks. These courses in recent years have done so much to establish our credibility within the game and I would urge many more members to take advantage of them.

By late autumn, the office scene is very clearly focused on membership subscription renewals and the BIGGA Turf Management Exhibition. This year there were particular difficulties with the extra demands made with The Duke of York's visit, coupled with staffing problems which came at the wrong time. However, we made it and all was in place for the Opening Ceremony on 20 January. The BTME has now become a focal point each year, not only for our members but for the trade and the industry as a whole, as well as attracting

increasing European participation.

I do not need to recount the success of the BTME – this is already well documented. I would say, however, that the professionalism which we have insisted on demonstrating on all occasions is in many ways the key to our success and the status we now enjoy within the game of golf. This professionalism was very evident in Harrogate and we must always be aware of the need to maintain it at all levels. Yes, we have a successful show but there must be no complacency. The exhibition industry is highly competitive and only hard work by all those involved in the BTME will ensure its continued success, coupled with a firm and ongoing commitment from the membership to support it. Allied to this must be a vision for its future growth and development, which will demand imaginative marketing strategies and which we are now addressing.

Following the BTME, your chairman and myself, together with Carol Dutton from our marketing team, attended the GCSAA Show in Anaheim, California, where again we had our own stand. Much interest was expressed in Association membership, magazine subscriptions and the BTME. Interest was heightened this year in that two of the four Master Greenkeeper Certificate awards at Harrogate were made to our American members and this has undoubtedly generated interest within the GCSAA. The presence of BIGGA on an international stage is important and whilst we now enjoy excellent relationships with the American, 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. How pleasing therefore to witness the very real enthusiasm within Europe, which was so evident during the European Forum held at the BTME. In the space of some ninety minutes no fewer than a dozen European speakers spoke of greenkeeping developments in their countries and of the need for BIGGA to co-ordinate increased co-operation between the greenkeeping associations in Europe.

Finally we come to the National Education Conference, held at the University of Keele. What a splendid location and excellent facilities. Like the BTME, this is a focal point in our year – the setting and the programme seem just right and our members gain so much from their participation over the three days – not only in the lecture theatre but during the subsequent social inter-action. Many now make the conference an annual event for, like Harrogate, we find that once a member has attended for the first time, he needs no persuading to return again.

So far I have spoken about the major events which focus our year. Behind them lies much organisation and they need to be considered in the context of the overall growth and development of the Association. This has been a year which has seen further acceleration in the pace of our progress. At the beginning of 1992 I announced the setting-up of an Education and Development Fund and much of our market-

ing during the year has been geared towards the establishment of this fund. The Golden and Silver Key memberships have undoubtedly been successful both in terms of attracting company and individual membership. We have built a sound base for the fund but, of course, it tends to be the more committed members both within the industry and the Association who take up membership in the first year. The real test will be in sustaining the growth of the fund in 1993 and beyond. It has proved possible, however, for your Board to take three important decisions in 1992 which have been made possible only through the attraction of finance into this fund.

The long-awaited career video will soon be a reality for 'shooting' has been largely completed. Scripting, commentary and editing have yet to be finalised and whilst it will be available later in the year, it is my intention to officially launch it during the Opening Ceremony of next January's BTME, which I am certain will ensure its maximum impact.

Secondly, the first in what we hope will become a series of training videos will shortly be completed and this first video will focus on the application of pesticides and fertilisers. It is the intention to provide every golf club with a copy and it should prove a major asset for training purposes.

Thirdly, the Board has decided to proceed with a Scholarship Awards Scheme, which will enable grants to be made to deserving individuals to assist them in pursuance of their college courses. This particular initiative needs a lot of consideration and discussion and should be viewed as achievable in the medium/long terms, possibly for the start of the September 1994 academic year. So we begin to see the benefits from the establishing of this fund and I would urge members as individuals, but also through their sections and regions, to give every possible support to ensure its growth.

However much we look to others within the game to fund greenkeeper education and training programmes, there must remain an element of self provision, which will allow us to determine our own priorities and future spending programmes. The fund is important for the Association and we will continue to market it to this effect and I would urge all members, sections and regions to support it.

During the year there have been a number of changes at headquarters, some a natural consequence of growth, others reflecting the personal circumstances of staff. In June we extended our accommodation by taking on an adjacent wing which had previously enjoyed multi-purpose use by the hotel. This expansion in office space arose from two factors – the by then obvious over-crowding within the original offices and the need to plan for and accommodate the proposed new GTC education unit. Now we have offices which will satisfy our needs in the medium term, although your Board remains mindful of the need to constantly review the longer term position.

Recently your Board has seen the need to strengthen certain areas of our administration

and plan for the future. In February our new administration manager, John Pemberton, joined the Association, replacing the previous holder of the finance officer post.

With the BTME and our market leader magazine, there is a great need to strengthen our marketing team and we have recently appointed a new sales and marketing assistant, Louise Lunn. Additionally, Samantha Collins has been appointed to relieve the burden on clerical and typing services. Inevitably there will be changes of role and job responsibilities but I am sure the structure gradually being put in place will serve the Association well for the future.

Coupled with these changes have been the major developments in relation to the establishment of the GTC's new education unit. The April issue of 'Greenkeeper International' sets out the current position in relation to the new unit and also relates to developments since May of 1992, culminating in the establishment of the new unit.

It is incumbent on us all to seek a successful outcome to the deliberations of recent months, which have been designed to ensure increased funding of education and training for greenkeepers in the future. In this regard, BIGGA will continue to take the lead role. We will seek a constructive working relationship with the GTC, particularly in relation to the next phase of development of the Training Manual and the introduction of the new NVQ system, in the hope that BIGGA's experience will be utilised and that much of its pioneering work will now come to fruition. Already it is clear that the GTC does not see itself contributing financially in future to BIGGA's own educational programmes and this emphasises the importance of our own Education and Development Fund. At present the GTC remains located within our offices until the education unit is relocated in the South Lodge at Aldwark Manor in October.

On a practical level it means that the Association has now lost the services of David Golding and Sue Gudgeon, so the staffing picture at headquarters is changing. Debbie and Samantha have now been with me for four years – since May 1989 – and they at least will be familiar faces when members visit Aldwark Manor. Debbie is now Education Officer, BIGGA, taking over responsibility for BIGGA's educational programmes and award schemes. Clair Douglas has recently been appointed to the Membership Services Section and Pauline Thompson has begun work in the Finance Section.

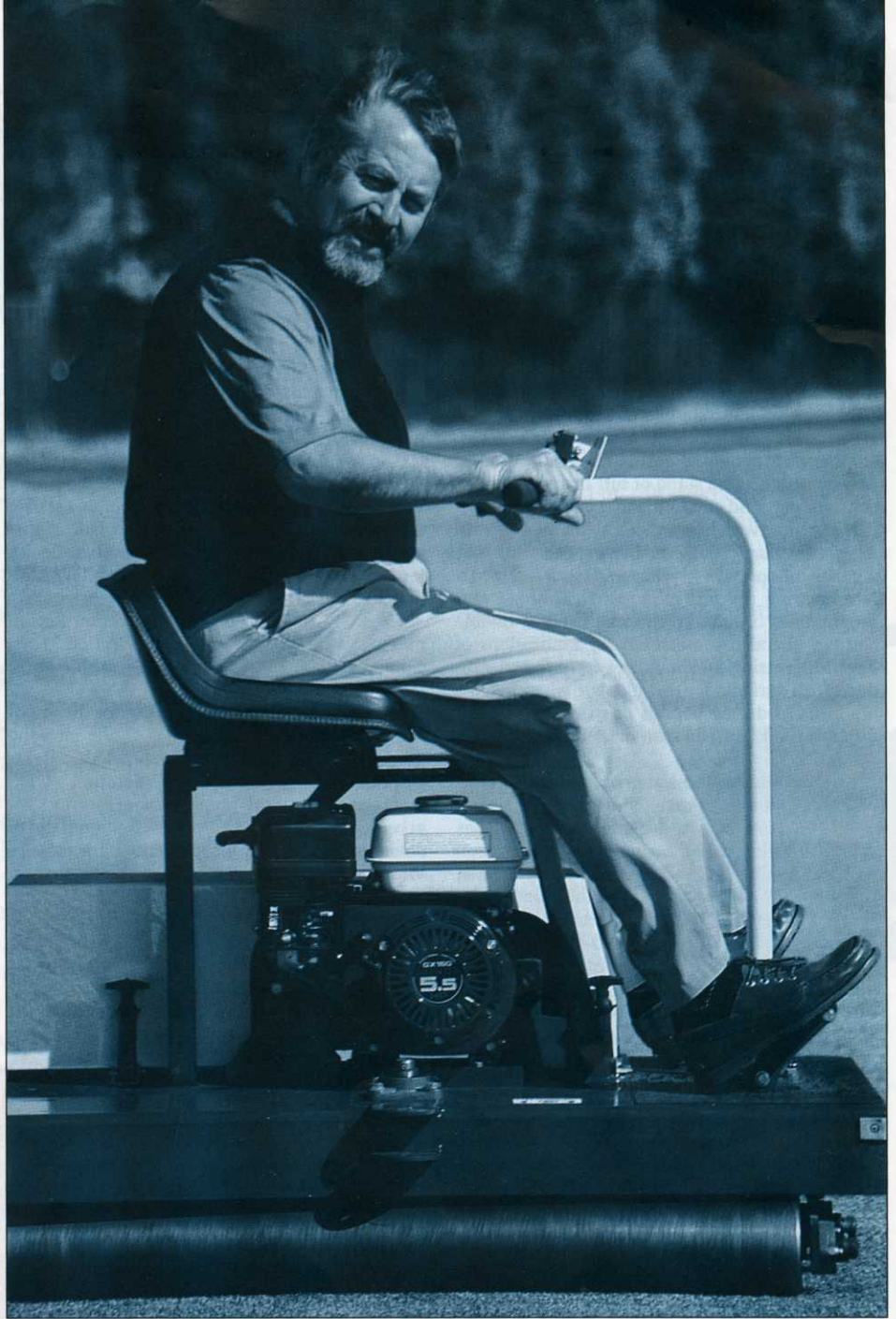
So finally, what of our future? Most certainly we are well settled at Aldwark Manor, though its future and therefore ultimately our future remains clouded with some uncertainty. I would estimate that if our current rate of progress is maintained we might well be running into accommodation problems in around three years time. There are plans for our development at Aldwark Manor but they depend on finances becoming available both from Aldwark Manor and our own point of

9 → view. These plans call for our involvement with the golf course as well as for the construction of new purpose built offices for ourselves. If these plans fail to come to fruition then, at some future date, we may need to seek an unwanted move from Aldwark Manor.

If uncertainties cloud our future at Aldwark Manor, then our future standing within the game looks much brighter than it did five years ago. We have created an impression, we are respected as a professional body that knows where it is going and, quite frankly, we are generally ahead of the game in our organisation, planning, administration, professionalism and indeed pure enthusiasm.

In getting ahead of the game, we do attract antagonism from time to time, but if progress and development attracts such antagonism then we have no need to be apologetic. We will continue to set standards and hopefully the game will react favourably. We shall certainly not be detracted from doing what is right for the greenkeeping profession and right for our members. We are not yet set on a firm base. We remain dependent on membership subscriptions and income from the BTME and 'Greenkeeper International' for our very existence and much more work remains to be done to ensure the security of our income from these three principal sources. In all three areas our marketing team faces formidable challenges.

Finally, my special and sincere thanks to our chairman, Roy Kates, for all he has achieved during his year of office. Like our previous chairmen, nothing had prepared him for his shock of becoming chairman of this vibrant Association of ours. It cannot be disputed that Roy has put himself about this past year on behalf of the Association. He has particularly had to cope with the 'politics' of the new education unit and his diplomacy during this period has been first-class. His employer at Wexham Park has given excellent backing and support, which was recognised by Viscount Whitelaw during BTME. The duties of chairman demand a substantial and ever-growing commitment and Roy has given freely of his time. I would conclude by thanking him for his steadfast support during the year. I am sure the experience he has gained will be utilised for the future benefit of BIGGA.



A spot of IRONING

DAVID WHITE (pictured) discovers how to increase putting speeds without stress

Eyebrows were raised, a murmur of disquiet droned across the crowded lecture theatre. Delegates at Keele were informed yet again that in America the greatest thing since sliced bread was not the stimpmeter, not the mower that grooms, trims and cuts grass lower than a gnats eye – and certainly not those unfamiliar strains of turfgrass suited more to desert conditions than the home counties of England.

No – the use of the piece of machinery known generically as the Australian Turf Iron is, we were assured, the course superintendent's best friend, currently winning great favour and influencing people in all manner of high places.

If you can believe that what America does today Britain will do tomorrow, the Turf Iron certainly deserves closer investigation, and it was with this in mind that I visited Went- ➔ 12