

Let's see now, we're titled the British and International Golf Greenkeepers Association, with the accent on the 'International' greater than ever seen before during our brief but meteoric rise. Yes, we also run a 'National' education conference that has grown in stature and appeal, one that attracts attendance from all corners of the globe. It's fame has blossomed and it now could accurately be called an International conference. All this was brought home to me when at an informal gathering held before the beginning of Keele '93, a table set for just twenty saw the following nations represented: Germany, Czechoslovakia, Switzerland, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, England and the good ol' U.S. of A! Any one still nursing doubt that BIGGA is an international force to be reckoned with needed look no further than the Keele lecture theatre, for no less than eleven nations were represented, the aforementioned topped up by representatives from Holland, Norway and Australia - our very own greenkeeping United Nations was in session!

It has been written before that three days of incarceration in a classroom is not something greenkeepers necessarily undertake voluntarily, yet the proof that BIGGA conferences are different - as

AN EDUCATING EXPERIENCE...



Conference luminaries, from left, Iain Ritchie, Sandy Anderson, John Crawford and Gary Grigg

much about learning through social intercourse as sucking in great chunks of knowledge in the lecture room - was brought forcibly home to me when I received a letter from an English delegate now resident in Lausanne, stating: 'I think I learned more in the few hours spent in the company of Professor Noel

Jackson than I have in the last few years here, talking with my fellow Swiss greenkeepers!' The truth is that greenkeepers are not only happy to learn, but in many cases are dedicated enough to pay their own fees, even though it is their club that reaps the benefit of their improved knowledge and technique.

It was Noel Jackson, formerly an STRI biologist and now a professor in plant pathology at the University of Rhode Island, who began the proceedings, discussing 'Cool Season Turf Diseases'. I hope Noel will forgive me if I refrain from summarising his talk, but I became mesmerised by his accent - as English as Yorkshire Pudding yet nevertheless adopting so many Americanisms - not unlike hearing Freddie Truman impersonating George Bush. I honestly couldn't concentrate, though I could tell from audience applause that his message was well received!

Few will deny that our members are the new, rising stars on the BIGGA lecture circuit and our next speaker was one such winner, Ian Tomlinson revealing the horrific problems associ- 12



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'As Bob Brame summarised, it pays to amplify your strengths and develop an appropriate strategy for improving your weaknesses'

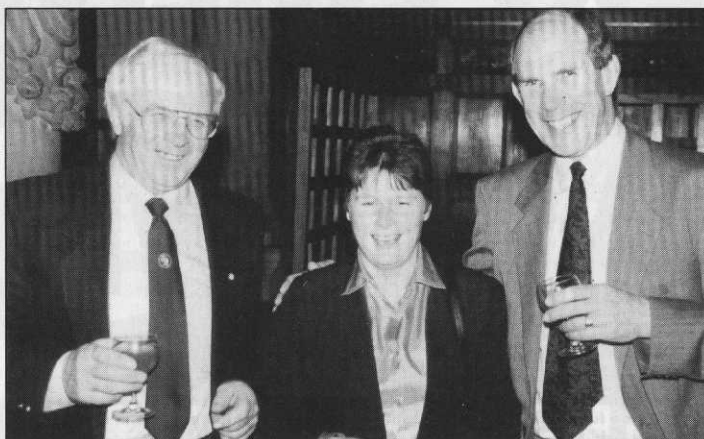
11 ➔ ated with maintaining turfgrass at 2800 feet above. In truth his slide show was more than just an overview of Swiss roll-overs such as snowmould, collapsing greens and uprooted trees, for Ian had embarked on several mammoth renovation programmes which he explained just had to be squeezed in between the meltdown and the time his members expected perfect playing conditions – calling for the skills of a juggler cum magician!

Tony Mears followed with a fascinating view on the wild side – golf that is – interspersing his illustrated lecture with anecdotes that left the listener in no doubt that wildlife and its preservation is something that we all should take to heart. It is encouraging to note that more and more courses are becoming special for reasons other than mere play, positive havens of natural beauty that we should vehemently fight to preserve.

The remaining sessions were taken by Dr Peter Hayes and Robert Brame, representing the STRI and the USGA Green Section respectively. It was interesting to compare the roles undertaken by these two bodies, for example the STRI are proud now to include golf course architecture among their expanding list of services whilst the USGA are hesitant to embark on such activities (save advising on such simple things as reconstruction of bunkers or tees) for fear of antagonising the American golf course architects. Interesting also was Bob Brame's revelation that *Poa annua* is as much of a problem on the far side of the pond as it is here – they manage it equally well, hate it just as much, but it just won't go away!

Restricted space prevents a full precis of every speaker and subject, but I must single out Patrick Murphy's re-building of a golf green – the clever fellow did it in just 16 days and had it back in play on the seventeenth, though one question remained in my mind – why the rush? Would the green not have been better, given longer to recover?

Ed McCabe and Arthur King, respectively course manager and green chairman at Brockenhurst Manor, proved a good double-act



Above:
Gordon Child,
Carol Borthwick and
Nick Rigden



Right:
George Brown,
Jane Ryan and
Bob Brame

and enlightened the audience to the necessity of communicating with members – here I found myself wishing that all clubs would adopt the Brockenhurst way, a case of greenkeepers educating members by telling 'em everything, even the unpalatable!

Gary Grigg, a GCSAA board member, continued in similar vein, of the opinion that greenkeepers must above all else cultivate the ability to communicate – that this universal weakness is more to blame for greenkeepers losing their jobs than any other, certainly more than the practical implications of course management that often are so unpopular – he urged delegates always to explain, be first with reasons before a single complaint becomes a thunderous roar. On the basis of what America does today we (possibly) will do tomorrow, Gary also told of the rapid growth in turf iron and Hydroject machinery usage in America – will we, I wonder, see these tools in every workshop in the next decade?

We learned from Seve Schmitz how computers aided the course manager, aided and abetted by Fred Robinson, and we listened to Ian Thomson's plea for sensible tree preservation and intelligent choice of species indigenous to our native habitat, all this before

anticipated a serenade from Anthony Davies. His title, 'Right or Wrong – I Did It My Way', evoked ideas of a Frank Sinatra style rendition – but we were robbed, no such song forthcoming, though his talk was highly original, hugely entertaining, and jam-packed with common sense observations.

The George Brown comedy half-hour nicely rounded off proceedings on day two, and though George took his audience on a slide tour of Turnberry, whilst also explaining the intricacies of managing such a high profile Open Championship site, he delivered in such a way that the audience was in no doubt – should he ever feel the desire to change his career, agents are waiting to sign him as the latest comic discovery!

From one comic to another, delegates were later entertained at dinner by Kevin Connelly, a clever impersonator who, whilst having the British contingent in stitches, must have baffled our American friends, for his act centred largely around British footballers!

I hesitate to suggest that Neil Thomas actually planned to keep the best till last, but whilst it is not unusual for folks to look at their watches during the final performances at some three day events, on this finale the feeling

was that the few hours remaining were just not enough. Noel Jackson excelled in his discussion of 'Patch Diseases in Cool Season Turf Grasses', prompting one delegate to opine that Noel's information was alone worth twice the total conference fee!

'Follow that' might have been the thought after Jackson's rouser, but we all know that Gordon Child can follow anyone and command rapt attention every time. Gordon revealed to this observer a side I'd not seen before: the philosopher, the comedian, and the man of the future. Sure, he's no longer a spring chicken but he thinks like a youngster and has the wisdom of age – a wonderful combination! Interspersed with clever cartoons drawn by our own John Moran, Gordon's 'Past, Present and Future' was, for me, the most down-to-earth home spun philosophy I'd heard in a very long while.

Yet more classic stuff followed, with Iain Richie describing his three years at Portmarnock, and at the risk of boring I'll declare that Iain's course would be the one above all others where I'd elect to play, given a single choice. If the layman has no idea how such a course can fall into disrepair, we were privileged to see how much Iain has achieved in his short time – it is not for nothing that he is thought of as a wizard by his grateful members!

Bringing down the curtain, Bob Brame made a welcome return to the rostrum with his 'Ten Pitfalls of Turfgrass Management' and to round off this report, let me repeat them: 1) Failure to communicate. 2) Overwatering. 3) Fast green speeds. 4) Unnecessary use of pesticides. 5) Lack of continuity in club personnel, especially at green committee level. 6) Inadequate maintenance buildings. 7) Tree management. 8) Amount of play, i.e. too much. 9) Not enough or under qualified labour. 10) Not enough or poor quality equipment. As Bob summarised, it pays to amplify your strengths and develop an appropriate strategy for improving your weaknesses. The alternative is to continue hitting your head on the same rock. 'Failure to study and learn from the past leaves us doomed to repeat it!'

DAVID WHITE