

# EGU attacks BIGGA

The English Golf Union has launched a surprising attack on your organisation. In the January/February edition of Amateur Golf it implies that it has grown too quickly and that the magazine is losing money. It is wrong on both counts. There are other veiled criticisms which we have answered below, but the big question is 'Why have they done it?'

FEBRUARY 1994 - 35

## AMATEUR GOLF ABOUT

January/February 1994

### GREENKEEPER'S ASSOCIATION UNDER SCRUTINY

British Greenkeepers, long regarded for their agronomic skills, have not until recent years acquired a reputation for enhancing their image, a pathway begun when the R & A funded and unified their three independent Associations in 1987 with clear objectives aimed at improving greenkeeper education.

The American Golf Course Superintendents had taken this path some 60 years previously, the fact that in greenkeepers here had a great deal of catching up to do was never in dispute, it was a question of how it could be done and how quickly. It is the latter part of the equation that would appear to be the cause of present problems.

To expand too quickly has been the down fall of many organisations. In the case of the British and International Golf Greenkeepers Association, the annual funding from the R & A believed to be in excess of £25,000 has run its full term as have grants from the Home Unions.

There has also been a substantial change in one of BIGGA's prime functions, that of greenkeeper training. This is now covered by an entirely separate organisation - The Greenkeeper Training Committee, with its own Director of Training, funded by the Home Unions through a levy on every club golfer, plus grants from the R & A and PGA European Tour.

BIGGA now have to rely on members subscriptions, currently around £52 for head greenkeepers and £45 for deputies. Some clubs pay these annual fees, others expect their employees to fund their own.

In addition BIGGA have set up a successful annual exhibition at Harrogate, and have the support of grants and gifts from the turf grass industry, though not without certain strings. They also publish a monthly magazine, which is certain to be the subject of some close questioning by Members at their AGM.

The fact that the magazine is once again in financial difficulty is not in dispute, what could be disturbing to the rank and file greenkeeper members is the expected Association reported loss of £29,000.

Since BIGGA moved from one rented room in the Sports Turf Research Institute at Bingley to Aldwark Manor, the administration has like Topsy - Grow'd and Grow'd.

In addition to the Executive Director Neil Thomas, with an executive salary and expenses to match, there are now ten additional staff on the headquarters payroll.

This includes a new magazine editor appointed at the beginning of January to replace their former editor David White. White resigned the position he had held since BIGGA launched their own in-house magazine in a highly publicized dispute with the Executive Director in November last year.

Fore-shadowing what is likely to be a lively AGM, Neil Thomas writing in current issue of their publication, has reacted to what he admits are varying degrees of criticism within the structure of the Association by expressing a need for better communication "at grass roots level".

1 What problems? BIGGA's showcase, the BTME, gets better and better each year, the magazine is a market leader and membership keeps growing.

2 There have been no direct grants from the Home Unions to BIGGA.

3 The GTC is not entirely separate as there is a great deal of collaboration between BIGGA's education unit and the GTC, as was seen with the new career video premiered at the BTME. BIGGA's in-house training programme continues to develop.

4 Not just successful, hugely successful (see this month's letters page).

5 Amateur Golf, what do you mean? No doubt the companies within the industry who support BIGGA would welcome an explanation of these 'strings'.

6 Well, we dispute it. Figures presented to members at the AGM showed that the magazine made a substantial profit and made a significant contribution to the growth of the Association.

7 Yes, it has *grow'd* and *grow'd*. Membership has *grow'd* 404 percent from 1278 in '87 to 5,162 in October '93, BTME has *grow'd* by 74 percent from '93 to '94 and 30 percent from '92 to '93, and the Association's turnover has *grow'd* from £61,258 in 1987 to £707,733 in the first nine months of 1993. Of course such growth can't be handled by a one-man band, so the staff has *grow'd* to 11.

8 Yes, David White chose to resign for his own reasons but we are surprised to hear of a highly publicised dispute.

9 The AGM was exceptionally well attended, highly constructive and ended with a whole-hearted endorsement of current direction and plans for the future.

Neil Thomas, BIGGA's executive director, commented:

"I find it extremely disturbing that 'Amateur Golf', the official journal of the English Golf Union, is prepared to publish so-called information on BIGGA's affairs which is untrue, lacking in fact, misleading and contains innuendo. The unwillingness to quote sources or follow basic journalistic principles of checking material must force the question as to the motivation for this article. At a time when BIGGA is seeking to work closely with Home Union representatives through the Greenkeepers Training Committee it must be a cause of deep regret that 'Amateur Golf' has printed material which can only be interpreted as designed to undermine the stability of an association whose dramatic progress over the last seven years is a credit to the partnership of members, officials and officers working for the betterment of the greenkeeping profession as well as to the support received from the R&A and companies working within the industry."