

# Association goes in the black as membership continues to climb

A large attendance of members on a snowy night was present to hear executive director, Neil Thomas, present his annual report.

After commenting on the major events of the year, he advised members that at last year's AGM the Board of Management had determined that a review be undertaken with the aim of agreeing a five year plan to take the Association up to the year 2000. Much progress had been made but such was the growth of the Association and the need for consultation at all levels that the Board at its September meeting decided to extend the review by the setting up of a Review Body which would make recommendations to the Board. It had originally been planned to report back to the AGM but the Board would now report to the 1996 AGM. It was considered important "to get it right" particularly in terms of any amendments to the Constitution and Rules of the Association. To this end the Review Body had already held two meetings.

In outlining the progress of the Education and Development Fund, the executive director pointed out that resources would now be made available for localised management training linked to the new NVQs/SVQs. Management training made affordable and accessible to members within their own Regions would be another great step forward for the Association. He referred to a fundamental issue simply defined as "who pays for greenkeeper education?" The Association was greatly dependent on the Education and Development Fund without which the videos, booklets, courses and educational aids provided by the Association would not be possible. It was generally considered that the levy to fund the GTC remains at a totally unrealistic level of 6.25p per registered golfer. Much depended therefore on how much or how little course managers and head greenkeepers could incorporate for training in their annual budgets and it must remain a great source of wonderment to outsiders that this remains an industry where many managers



John Millen helps Barry Heaney to don his jacket as BIGGA's new chairman

and employees are expected to pay themselves for their further education and training.

BIGGA's membership had increased by 390 to a final figure of 5,552 for 1994. At the conference dinner, the ninth recipient of the Master Greenkeeper Certificate, Richard McNabb from Palmetto Golf Club, Aiken, South Carolina had been recognised and it was pleasing that at present 105 members are registered for the award with 65 in Stage 1, 32 in Stage 2 and 8 in Stage 3.

There is concern at the continuing trend of golf clubs to disclose greenkeeper salaries and wages to fellow golf clubs in the area. These cartels appear to be widespread. They are felt to be in existence to establish a norm which is unlikely to be to the benefit of the greenkeeper. Neil Thomas suggested that at the very least the confidentiality which should be enjoyed between employer and employee is broken through the existence of these cartels and a greenkeeper has every right to complain when he knows that this practice has been applied to his own contract of service. When evidence is forthcoming it is a practice which needs to be exposed through the pages of *Greenkeeper International*.

At the conclusion of his report, the executive director analysed the issues concerning the future of the BTME and the threat of a competing show organised by P&O Events in conjunction with the English Golf Union and

planned for 16-18 January 1996. He pointed out the potential financial implications for BIGGA whilst outlining the need for BIGGA to remain a strong, respected and independent body within the game – a position which could be threatened by absorption into a new show organised by those motivated purely for profit and with no intrinsic regard for greenkeepers or greenkeeping. He believed that exhibitors remained loyal to the BTME in Harrogate and a solid base existed for further growth and development of the BTME. Essentially as executive director he needed to go away from the AGM with a clear mandate from the membership in general meeting as to how they wished to proceed. On a show of hands there was unanimous backing for the continuation of the BTME in Harrogate.

BIGGA's administration manager, John Pemberton presented the financial report which showed a transformation from a deficit in 1993 to a small surplus in 1994. He pointed out that the Association continues to rely heavily for its funding on the three main activities of membership, *Greenkeeper International* magazine and BTME. He reminded members who pay their own subscriptions that they are approved by the Inland Revenue for personal tax relief and may be claimed through the annual tax return. Advertising revenue for *Greenkeeper International* had increased

by 17.8% reflecting the quality of the magazine which remains a significant net contributor to the Association's funds. The BTME of 1994 had been the activity which had brought about a dramatic change in the Association's financial position. It was pointed out that the Board of Management had agreed to establish an independent Building Fund to generate funds towards the ultimate purchase of the Association's own premises. Areas of funding were being investigated to link into whatever capital the Association could raise itself.

Following questions from members the meeting went on to elect Messrs Roger Robinson and Bill Lawson as Trustees. This was followed by backing for a constitutional amendment allowing for the implementation of a rolling membership year after the executive director had pointed out that this alteration would assist the workload involved with renewal, especially as membership grows, by phasing renewal processing. It might also encourage recruitment as greenkeepers would receive a year's membership from whenever they chose to join. The meeting then unanimously approved the Board's proposals for life membership for Mr Eric James and Mr Bert Cross.

The outgoing Chairman, John Millen, thanked the Board and staff for their efforts during the past year and then invested the incoming Chairman, Barry Heaney, with his red blazer. The new Chairman thanked the retiring Board members for their services. George Malcolm was replaced on the Board by Pat Murphy. Huw Parry was replaced by Robin Greaves and John Millen was replaced by Chris Mardon. In Scotland John Crawford was stepping down and a replacement would be announced shortly. Barry Heaney announced that his Vice-Chairman would be Dean Cleaver. He concluded by thanking BIGGA's President, Viscount Whitelaw, John Millen, the Board of Management, staff and all members of the Association for their support and his golf club and by no means least his wife, for their encouragement.