

A fair day's pay?

Let me this month tackle the vexed issue of salaries and wages. Now here surely is a subject close to the heart of every greenkeeper and a central point of many a green committee discussion.

Since 1988 BIGGA has annually published a 'Recommended Minimum Salary/Wages Scale'. Note the use of the word "recommended" for we are a professional association and as such enjoy no powers as a bargaining body on salary levels. In any event it would surely be almost impossible to negotiate with over 2,000 golf clubs each independently structured and governed by its own circumstances as to what it can or is prepared to pay its staff. In the course of time over seven years our scale has come to be increasingly recognised by golf clubs as a yardstick in determining greenstaff salary levels. It is interesting to compare figures. In 1988 the recommended salary for a Course Manager/Head Greenkeeper was £12,650 for an 18 hole golf course, today it is £19,144. For an apprentice greenkeeper in 1988 we were seeking £70.77 per week, today that figure stands at £108.15. Whilst there are a good number of clubs in excess of the scale and too many still below it, it is encouraging to hear that many clubs who have yet to reach the scale do accept it in principle and are moving towards the scale recommendations through phased annual awards. It would seem that in the intervening years since 1988 BIGGA can justifiably claim that its scale has had a positive impact on salary and wages levels as well as on conditions of service. Such a statement is not to negate the very real concern for greenkeepers in certain pockets of the United Kingdom who remain grossly underpaid by their golf clubs and whose circumstances are such that they are prevented from moving elsewhere to better themselves. We will continue to seek to influence those clubs for the betterment of our members and in the course of time one looks to the establishment of a framework within the game of golf whereby the clubs, through the four home unions, will agree to implement scales either better than or in line with the Association's recommendations.

Linked to salaries and wages are the opportunities now avail-



BIGGA in focus

BY NEIL THOMAS

able for trained and ambitious greenkeepers. Here most certainly the world has opened out since 1988 and particularly in Europe. This does not mean that every greenkeeper need look to Europe for a step up the ladder. Indeed he would be wise not to do so without a full assessment of his domestic situation and of the different and often difficult conditions to be experienced abroad as well as of his own aptitude for learning a foreign language. However, for those so-minded, there are many challenging opportunities abroad and each greenkeeper who moves on in this direction leaves a consequential vacancy somewhere in the United Kingdom. In 1995 greenkeeping is a profession which offers some excellent opportunities. As in

other professions people must be prepared to move to take advantage of them. These factors combine to push up salaries, wages and conditions of service and from my experience if there has been one fundamental change since 1988 it lies in the growing realisation by golf clubs that once they have secured good staff they need to hold on to them – again improving the bargaining power of the individual employees. In the early days of BIGGA there was far more of a 'take it or leave it' attitude and many were the clubs rueing the fact that they had needlessly lost a good employee and finding it necessary to pay more to secure possibly a less proficient replacement.

Annual negotiations over salaries and conditions of service are never easy and many greenkeepers I know feel threatened by what they believe are groupings of golf club secretaries who, in comparing salary and wage levels for greenstaff in their clubs, seek to depress those levels to the lowest common denominator. I have no doubt there will have been past instances of this happening perhaps influenced by local circumstances. However, I recently discussed this matter with Ray Burniston, Secretary of the Association of Golf Club Secretaries, and in conceding that club secretaries do make comparisons he takes the

view that generally this is to the benefit of greenkeepers. In other words that the highest common denominator will prevail. Ray pointed out that where there is evidence to the contrary he will be more than happy through his Association to take the matter up with the club concerned. If a member has a particular grievance in this regard please channel it through Headquarters and it will then be taken up through the AGCS. Remember, however, that some hard facts will be needed and hearsay will not be sufficient.

In looking up the 1988 scale, it was interesting to note the number of letters I sent out in August 1987, the month during which BIGGA commenced operations at the STRI in Bingley, in response to requests for a recommended salary/wages scale. These requests came not only from greenkeepers but also from the golf clubs themselves. I vividly recall the urgency with which the then Board of Management impressed upon me the need for such a scale. In seven years little has changed in that the scale is still greatly in demand. I believe it has achieved much for greenkeepers and continues to do so. To those for whom the achievement of the scale recommendations seems still a remote possibility I would urge perseverance. For our part within the Association we will continue in our efforts to break down intransigent attitudes seeking fair and proper recompense for those who manage the golf club's greatest asset. A scale such as ours cannot keep everybody happy all of the time and sometimes it is forgotten that the job is not just about salaries and wages in that various conditions of service need to be taken into account. Whatever the package never sign a contract unless you are happy with it and even then having it checked by a solicitor is likely to prove a sound investment.

Finally, we should recognise the golf clubs who now provide first class conditions of service for our members with consequent benefits for their golf courses and express the hope that those clubs still lost in the mists of time will come to understand that it is the former who represent the way forward and the future for the game of golf.

New magazine editor appointed

Scott MacCallum, pictured, is the new editor of *Greenkeeper International*.

Hailing from Scotland where he worked on the *Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, *Evening Telegraph* and *Sunday Post*, Scott subsequently worked as assistant editor on *Golf Monthly* before joining the PGA European Tour in 1990, initially as deputy director of communications before being appointed director in 1991. Latterly he has worked for *Today's Golfer* as deputy editor.

In welcoming the appointment, BIGGA's executive director, Neil Thomas, said: "I am

sure that Scott MacCallum will bring a new dimension to *Greenkeeper International* magazine. He has a wealth of journalistic experience within the game of golf and as a member of the Association of Golf Writers is well respected by the golfing press and media.

"I am delighted that he is joining the Association and feel sure that he will be making a substantial contribution not only with regard to the magazine's development but also in terms of BIGGA's public relations function and developing relationships with other bodies and officials within the game."

