

This year is the diamond anniversary of the Midland Section and Scott MacCallum meets up with a Greenkeeper who was there from Day One

It only seems like yesterday

In March 1936 25 year-old Reg Pugh was one of 30 greenkeepers who attended a meeting in the Hope and Anchor Hotel in Edmond St, Birmingham, with a view to forming the Midland Section.

Sixty years on Reg's recollections of the meeting are as if it were only yesterday.

"It was Chaired by Mr E.G. Hawtree and our first President was Carl Bretherton, first Chairman was George Hart of Gay Hill – coincidentally the course at which current National Chairman Dean Cleaver is Course Manager – and the first Secretary was Ernest Collingwood of Sandwell Park," says Reg, without recourse to records or diaries.

"I'm the last remaining of the original members who formed the Midland Section. It's a shame really. Where the meeting was held doesn't exist either any more because of the restoration of Birmingham. There's a place called Fletcher's Wharf where it used to be."

The Midland Section was the second section in the country to be formed, following on from the Southern Section, but was the first to allow assistants to play in tournaments. It grew quickly to the extent that there were over 100 members by the early 40s.

"Initially the main purpose of the Section was to hold and run golf events but education became a part of the Section in the mid 50s. We were going to make a presentation to F.G. Hawtree for services to the Association but it was decided that we should form the Apprentice Scheme for green-

keepers as a tribute to him instead," explained Reg who was Midland Secretary and Competition Secretary for 20 years and who is still now Senior Vice President of the National Public Courses Association for England.

Reg's memory stretches back to the days when horses pulled carts around the golf course and the special shoes they wore to prevent them digging up the turf.

"When I first started work I used a scythe and a sickle and we only had one push mower to cut the greens. Someone cut nine in the morning and someone else cut the other nine in the afternoon – everything else was horse drawn triples.

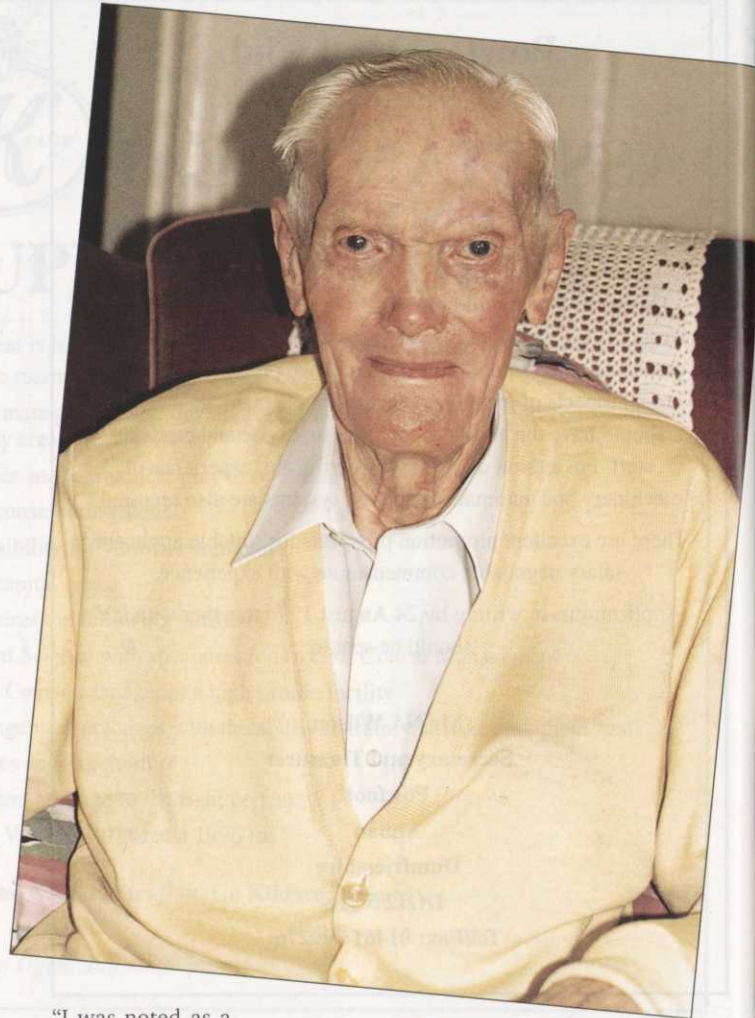
"Equipment wise there is no comparison now. If people had told me years ago that someone would sit on a machine to mow a green I wouldn't have believed them.

"The greenkeeping profession has come on leaps and bounds. I think it's marvellous. There is a huge number of people involved in it now whereas before we were working in isolation."

As a reminder of the uncertain nature of the profession he can recall an incident at Halesowen Golf Club.

"I had the misfortune to break a mower when I was crossing a brook – one of the cast iron sockets at the front snapped – and I lost my job because of it."

An excellent golfer he played to scratch or one for 15 years from 1939 and was still playing to seven when he finally gave up three years ago, regularly beating his age comfortably.



"I was noted as a long hitter. When I was in the RAF police in the war I was able to play free at Royal Lytham and I can remember driving the green at the 16th and another occasion when, because of a hard frost and the ground was so firm I hit the clubhouse wall from the tee at the 18th.

"I didn't play county golf because I was a member of a municipal course. If you didn't have a wallet they didn't want to know," he says matter of factly.

Reg was also Head Greenkeeper at Sandwell when the first tournament to have a first prize of £1000 was played in Britain.

"It was won by Peter Butler who was born and brought up in these parts," said Reg who lives in Warley in the West Midlands.

The aftermath of that tournament saw the end of Reg's greenkeeping career.

"It rained all that week and I had to go back at the end of the day in the tractor and tow cars out of the car park. I got wetter and wetter, caught pleurisy for a year and had to retire from ill health."

After a lifetime in the industry Reg has some advice for the greenkeepers of today.

"Their first and major thought should be for the turf. I had to

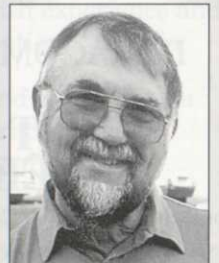
find all my own formulas for dressing, changing sulphurs to get the correct mixtures etc.

"I could write you a formula to mix on your own lawn, I don't care where you live, and you'd be tripping over the grass in a fortnight. It is no trouble to me to get grass to grow."

Looking back at his career and the progress since that meeting in March 1936 Reg has no regrets about his career.

"I've had a wonderful life in greenkeeping and it's remarkable the amount of change that's happened in the job."

THE BIGGEST MISTAKE I'VE EVER MADE AND WOULD ADMIT TO IS:



"Coming into greenkeeping too late in life because I've had more happiness in the last 10 years than I had in the previous 37"

Peter Biscoe, retired