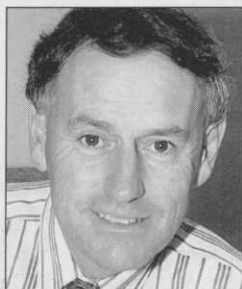


The second decade begins...

As the bells chime to welcome in the New Year, BIGGA will be ten years old. Formally constituted on 1 January 1987 it hardly seems credible that the years have flown past so rapidly and the Association is now celebrating its tenth anniversary. A time then to reflect and to look forward.

Reflecting over the past decade there have been some heady times and also some low ones. Yet it has been a story of steady advance from small beginnings. An initial 1,200 members from the three former associations has grown to 6,200 and BIGGA now offers its members comprehensive services and benefits. Our education and training programmes are the envy of other professional bodies and we communicate and inform through our award winning magazine *Greenkeeper International*. The annual BIGGA Turf Management Exhibition is the highlight of the year for the Greenkeeping profession and acknowledged by the industry as the leading indoor exhibition of its kind in Europe. I am sure that this all sounds self-congratulatory but rest assured that a high degree of realism permeates the corridors of BIGGA's headquarters. If BIGGA now enjoys some relatively prosperous times it was not always so and much was learnt from some salutary experiences which is reflected today in the way the organisation is run and how we conduct our business. I use the word business advisedly for, although a professional association, the hardest lesson of all that was learnt in the formative years of BIGGA was that we were subject to commercial realities and of necessity had to be run on business lines. Today the systems are in place to ensure our competitiveness and to avoid those early pitfalls which threatened to undermine our development.

Much time could be spent on reflection but essentially it is a time to look forward. The greenkeeping profession has taken giant steps forward in the past ten years particularly in terms of its professionalism and its status within the game of golf. Yet much remains to be done. The signs are encouraging for the future as



BIGGA in focus

BY NEIL THOMAS

indicated by two events I recently attended. The Toro/PGA European Tour Student Greenkeeper of the Year Award has been running since 1989 and is now well established in the greenkeeping calendar. It was rewarding therefore to experience the ever-increasing calibre of the student greenkeepers within the profession. An excellent winner this year will uphold the best traditions of the award while it is pertinent to point out that the two runners up are only 20 years of age. The greenkeeping world lies before all three and, in talking at length with them, one is left with the impression that the future of the profession is in safe hands if we continue to produce the young, articulated and well trained greenkeepers who are now perceiving greenkeeping to be an attractive career option.

The second event was a meeting of the South Coast Section to which I was invited last month. This was a well-attended meeting and many were the informed questions in relation to the run-

ning of the Association and our future direction. The meeting demonstrated the commitment of so many members to BIGGA and this can only hold us in good stead for the future. Here is a well-organised section and BIGGA continues to depend on its sections and regions to provide the organisational structure at "grass roots" level to support our large and growing membership. One pointer for the future is the need for more members to be active within their local sections. Too much work and responsibility placed on too few is not the way forward, while the sharing of tasks generally contributes to a section's vitality and development.

On a personal note it was a pleasure to meet up again with Eric James one of the profession's longest serving members and a member of BIGGA's first Board of Management back in 1987. He seemed in fine fettle and it was reassuring to note his continued enthusiasm and to be reminded of the continuity Eric and others have provided in the development and progress of the profession over many years.

A few final thoughts on the future. Perhaps first and foremost is the issue of job security for our members. In recent years golf has offered more employment opportunities as a fast-growing sport. Yet, conversely, greenkeeper jobs seem to have become less secure. There are huge pressures and demands these days from golf club members but often the termination of employment is the result of ill-informed judgments and failure to understand the technicalities and complexities of

today's greenkeeping world. Whether it be the implementation of legislation or the effects of prevailing weather conditions, there is a need to communicate and inform and BIGGA will need to work with golf clubs and their green committees in the days ahead.

Environmental matters are well to the forefront in our planning with a new video to be launched at the BTME and BIGGA will continue to pursue a leading role in the debate on environmental and ecological management of the golf course.

The education and training of greenkeepers will continue as the Association's flagship and it will be incumbent on the ambitious greenkeeper to be trained in management and supervisory as well as greenkeeping skills if career progress is to be successfully pursued. Some of BIGGA's members are now competing for top jobs at golf courses such as General or Estate Managers and this is a trend I see continuing and being accentuated in the future. Look, too, for opportunities in Europe as the newly-formed Federation of European Golf Greenkeepers Associations (FEGGA) brings greenkeeping and greenkeepers throughout Europe closer together.

Lastly, and in the immediate future, BIGGA will be looking to build a new headquarter's office – a prestige building to take the Association into the 21st Century and to serve its members in future generations. So as its second decade begins, BIGGA can indeed hold its head up high and look forward to exciting times and challenges ahead.

New irrigation system for Stoke Poges

Stoke Poges Golf Club has signed a £500,000 contract with Turf Irrigation Services for a comprehensive new golf course irrigation system using Toro equipment. The existing 26 year old system which waters greens and tees will be replaced with irrigation to all fairways, greens, greens approaches and the driving range.

The system will use a combination of Toro sprinklers which have been chosen to meet the particular irriga-

tion requirements of the course. The use of Toro PC based control and pop-up sprinklers which can be operated individually, will ensure accurate and effective placement of water, thereby proving the most efficient and cost effective irrigation.

Stoke Poges Golf Club has received planning permission for the construction and restoration of an additional nine holes. This will recreate the historic Harry Shapland Colt

layout which dates from 1908. The club changed hands in 1993 and since that time £5 million has been spent on restoring the Grade I listed clubhouse, the surrounding gardens, which include a Repton Bridge (1799) and "Capability" Brown Cascades (1750), and the golf course to their former glory.

The extra nine holes and additional facilities will cost a further £4 million over the next 12 months.