



Most industries have their own night of nights. The Oscars are the most famous of them all. They are occasions to celebrate excellence and reward people who have reached the top of their chosen field.

BIGGA has had such nights in the past – separate events covering both the greenkeeper and student greenkeeper of the year titles but only this year have they been combined and under the titles of Excellence in Greenkeeping Award and Student of the Year to become known as "The Toros".

It has come about due to Toro adding the new Excellence Award to the Student of the Year.

To be known as a Toro winner, or indeed a finalist, now means entry to a select club for both students and established greenkeepers.

**TORO**

Student  
**GREENKEEPER**  
of the year



# The TOROs



The winner: Ian McMillan, holding plate and certificate, with, from left, Bob Buckingham, Toro and Pete Mansfield, Lely and BIGGA Vice-Chairman Gordon Child

## Notes from a small island

**Walter Woods visited the courses of all five finalists and what he found gladdened his heart**

**T**he Toro Award for Excellence in Greenkeeping certainly conjures up all sorts of factors in your mind – how do you measure good greenkeeping or good greenkeepers? These were some of the thoughts which went through my mind many years ago

when I first set foot in Elmwood College to talk to students who were taking their first ambitious steps into a greenkeeping career. During that period the only education available was a one year course to achieve a City and Guilds certificate. Fortunately, owing to the dedicated effort of many, mainly greenkeepers themselves, education has advanced considerably even almost to a University Degree in Agronomy.

The Toro Company based this award on Course Managers' ability to organise their affairs both in maintenance and management. The philosophy was the more encouragement greenkeeping education receives the more that golf clubs with their golf courses will improve.

The '97 competition got going in earnest in April when nominations were accepted at BIGGA Headquarters. Each entry was vis-

### THE FOUR RUNNERS-UP



Ratho Park



Nottingham Golf Club



View of the course at  
Hankley Common



ited at local level with a winner coming from each Section.

The final five Section winners were Tom Murray, Ratho Park, Edinburgh; Philip Stain, Nottingham Golf Club; Mark Ford, Kingsdown Golf Club; Ian MacMillan, Hankley Common Golf Club and William Sparrow, East Herts Golf Club – all spread out across the length and breadth of Britain. The Competition had a high judging criteria right through every part of their golf course maintenance, taking into account the level of resources available. Other judgments on the individuals were their role in the golf club management coupled with their ability to set policies throughout the daily work programmes either on the golf course or in the maintenance building.

Ken Richardson, the Association's Education Officer, is certainly a perfectionist, with military precision on train journeys, golf course locations, time of arrivals – this made me wonder why trains are always late when I organise them. However, my first golf course was Notts Golf Club, Hollinwell, where at one time I was employed. What a majestic golf course this is, organised in a traditional manner with a large history spanning over a 100 years. Philip Stain is the Course Manager and what a super job this young man is doing – with tidily kept maintenance buildings housing the most up-to-date machinery. Philip has been at Notts Golf Club for a number of years but this has been his first one in total charge. He has taken it in his stride and has

hosted a top amateur event to the complete satisfaction of players and members.

Next on the list was Kingsdown Golf Club, near Bristol, a very progressive golf club with recent acquisition of land on which to build a practice ground and perhaps extend the golf course. Mark Ford has worked at the golf



course for 20 years and been the Course Manager for the last seven. Kingsdown is a parkland course but was in very good condition. Mark is also very enthusiastic in education on all aspects of club management.

The following day it was organised to visit Hankley Common, a heathland golf course with outstanding natural beauty

and what I would say is an example for every golf club to follow. About 10 years ago the Club Council drew up policies in every department of golf club organisation. Their first priority was to employ a Course Manager which they did with Ian MacMillan, son of Jack, coming on board. The golf course was in magnificent condition with perfect playing conditions. Heather was in abundance making it into an environmentalist's dream.

Travelling from Hankley Common to East Herts Golf Club is two train journeys, numerous tube rides then miles of twisting roads through traffic lights and traffic jams bringing you to a lovely parkland golf course with mature trees where deer and pheasants roam undisturbed, making me think what would happen to them if they were on a municipal course in Glasgow! Bill Sparrow is Course Manager and has an abundance of experience which he is putting to good effect to the golf playing conditions along with the training of his young staff. Bill is also a very good golfer and knows what a golfer's requirements should be.

Back to Scotland to visit Ratho

Park, a private golf club not far from Edinburgh Airport, and what a surprise confronted me. A beautiful parkland golf course in perfect condition with fast firm fairways and greens along with tees perfectly cut and presented. Tom Murray, the Course Manager, has worked at Ratho, I believe, all his working days taking charge in the last ten years. Tom is a product of Elmwood College and certainly a credit to his club who encourage him.

On completion of the golf course visits and assessments all of the five finalists still had to go through the mental barrier with a vigorous interview session to a selected Panel which was organised in Harrogate on October 27. Each of the candidates were asked like-for-like questions to create consistent answers on a similar pattern. This was terrifying for the individual and it could be detected on their faces. However a winner had to be chosen and this was Ian MacMillan making it a remarkable double for the golf club having won the BIGGA Golf Environment Award, in association with Amazone and Rhône Poulenc only two weeks before.

Ian receives a two week trip to the USA taking in the Superintendents' Convention, in California, which is the ultimate in learning. He will also be taken to the machinery and irrigation Toro factories. His golf club, Hankley Common, also benefit being presented with a new Toro Greensmaster Greens Triplex.

The other four finalists were also presented with cheques and gifts. The Toro Company has been outstanding in their contribution towards greenkeeping education and encouragement. Bob Buckingham and Graham Dale along with their colleagues should be congratulated.



East Herts G C



Kingsdown Golf Club





# The TOROs

**Hankley Common's Ian McMillan set himself and his golf club two goals at the beginning of the year. On each occasion he scored the winner.**

**H**ow many of us set goals at the beginning of each year? One, two, three four... Yep! I make that most of us. How many of us actually achieve them? One, two... any more? No, I'm afraid that's about it.

One of the guys who should have had his hand up is Ian McMillan, Course Manager at Hankley Common in Surrey who, like so many of us, set himself some goals in January. They were to win both the inaugural Toro Award for Excellence in Greenkeeping and the BIGGA Golf Environmental Award, in association with Amazone and Rhône Poulenc. Ten months, and a great deal of hard work later both trophies sit together proudly in a little corner of Surrey.

If the name is familiar perhaps it should be because Ian belongs to perhaps the best known family in the world of greenkeeping. Dad, Jack, was Course Manager at Sunningdale for many years and is a Past Chairman of BIGGA. He is now a respected consultant. Ian's oldest brother Stewart is Course Manager at Leatherhead, Bobby at Burhill, Billy is General Manager of both Wildwood and Lamerwood golf clubs and younger brother Cameron at Stockley Park – all are top golf courses and it's a dynasty unrivalled in golf.

"I don't know how or why it is that I'm the one who has gone for the awards. I enjoy entering into things that are competitive but I certainly wouldn't look forward to the prospect of competing against them," laughed 36 year-old Ian. It certainly isn't a male only family sister, Heather, now a nurse, has also spent time working with Cameron and mother, Rita, has probably picked up enough knowledge to be a dead cert if she were ever to



The winner, runners-up and competition organisers. Top row, from left, Bob Buckingham, Graham Dale, Neil Thomas, Walter Woods. Front row, Mark Ford, Philip Stain, Ian McMillan, Tom Murray and William Sparrow

## Fanfare for the Common man

sit a Master Greenkeeper exam.

Ian had previously entered both competitions in their old formats in the past and had been runner-up in each of them – in the Premier Greenkeeper in '92 and the Environment Competition in '95.

"That basically made us feel that we could win them both and we worked very hard at putting both documents together," said Ian, using the plural to reflect the input he received from his three Course Members – Hankley's version of a Chairman of Green – John Harris, Peter Green and the present incumbent, Alan Kerr; the Club Secretary, John O'Brien; his team and his family.

"The competitions complemented each other. Both entries were fairly weighty documents – about 60 pages each – and there

was a considerable amount of thought put into them. I started work on the Environment entry in January, completed it, then started on my entry for the Toro award.

"Inevitably we thought it would be a bit of a fairy tale to win them both."

Asked if winning one and finishing runner-up in the other would have been seen as a failure Ian paused before smiling and saying slowly.

"We do set our goals high. We like to achieve."

Winning was not without its pressure and Ian freely admits to feeling nervous as he sat in the St George's Hotel, Harrogate, waiting for the result of the Toro Award to be announced.

"I could certainly feel the tension in the room and I didn't

really realise just how tense I was myself," he explained.

No-one who watched Ian make his victory speech could have doubted just how much winning the award meant to him and it was clear that his unique pedigree, a desire to learn and many years of hard work had combined to make him an outstanding winner.

"My father never wanted any of us to be greenkeepers but it was a desire of mine from fairly early on. I enjoyed the game, I liked the outdoor way of life and tinkering with mowers. There were lots of aspects which attracted me in those early days."

Ian grew up at Cardross Golf Club in Scotland and it was there that he picked up his love of golf.

"We moved south to Bush Hill Park, North London, and that's where I started work as an apprentice under my father." Remarkably four out of five of the McMillans worked on the course at the same time. Jack, Stewart, Ian and Bobby before Jack moved to Effingham Golf Club and Stewart took over as Head Greenkeeper at Bushill.

"I was there for four years then moved to Datchet which was my first job as Head Greenkeeper. It was 1981 and I was 20. After three years I moved to Finchley and spent a couple of years there before going to Hankley as Course Manager in 1986.

"Hankley was a real magnet. I'd played the course before and I was very fond of the area but I really had a desire to work on a heathland golf course.

"When I was at Datchet I lived at Sunningdale and gained lots of heathland experience helping my father and I certainly appreciated the finer aspects of it," he explained.

Ian's 12 years at Hankley have, by his own admission, been exciting and very progressive times.

"The whole club is run by very professional people, many of them company directors, and through dealing with these peo-



# TORO® Student GREENKEEPER of the year

ple and sharing their skills and experience I've learned communication skills, computer usage, dealing with budgets etc. Equally I was imparting my greenkeeping skills to them. It was a very good partnership."

One of the interesting concepts at Hankley is the Course Management Status Report which is published every two to three years.

"It talks about greenkeeping philosophy, it talks about woodland management, the turfed areas, conservation areas, staff requirements, resource requirements. All aspects of the golf course. It also pinpoints what we want to achieve and reviews some of our successes and things which haven't worked so well," explained Ian, who has produced four of these 24-25 page reports.

## 'We do set our goals high. We like to achieve'

"I get lots of comments from members who find them refreshing and interesting because we try to write them in such a manner that they are readable for members.

"If we were to do them more frequently than we do it wouldn't give us enough time to achieve some of the goals we set," he added.

The Hankley team – Gareth Roberts, Paul Hutton, Michael Jennings, James Andrews and Gavin Baldwin – are all over the moon about the club's success and Ian is quick to give them credit.

"You are only as good as the guys around you and none of these things would have been possible without them.

Ian's self confessed passion for the environment has been with him for many years and developed from his love of heathland golf courses.

"I realised that heathland was disappearing at a phenomenal rate and that developed to an appreciation of wildlife as well. That has grown through time."

Asked to comment on what answer he would give to other greenkeepers who might ask what he possesses which has helped him to two national competitions Ian gives a practical answer.

"These competitions are there to be won and the way to do it is by application and endeavour and I think we did that. If you can exhibit the history of the work you have done on your course by keeping a well documented file of slides it also helps.

"There are a tremendous number of fabulous greenkeepers out there and what I can say to them is that I've been runner-up in both competitions before and that made me focus more and made me realise that I had to work a bit harder to win...So we came back a second time and won them both."

He also has praise for both competitions and what they do for the profession.

"They highlight the professionalism that's around in the industry. BIGGA is very much to the forefront of initiating lots of that through their education training programmes," said Ian, who is married to Karen with three children Callum, 8, Hannah, 6, and Daniel, 2.

"It has been an absolute pleasure to represent my golf and the staff at both of these competitions. I'm just the ambassador and an awful lot goes on behind the scenes."

Speaking with Jack about his son he pays him a tribute to which greenkeepers would probably relate.

"He's like me," he explained, "the grass talks to him."



Steven Nixon collects his prizes from Gordon Child, right, as Bob Buckingham and Pete Mansfield look on

# The best of both worlds

**Steven Nixon has shown he can excel in two careers**

To reach the top in one field takes dedication, effort and no little ability. It's a reason to feel extremely proud and self satisfied. After all, there can only be one at the top at any one time.

To reach the top in two fields, singles a person out as quite exceptional, and to have done it by the age of 26 is even more remarkable.

Such a person is Steven Nixon, winner of the Toro Student of the Year Award, who adds the title to that of MAA YTS Mechanic of the Year which he won seven years ago.

"Having won another national competition I didn't go into the Toro Student of the Year thinking that it was so far out of reach not to be worth bothering about. You do get a belief in yourself having won a big competition and I was quietly confident when I arrived for the final... That was until I started to talk with the others. They were all good guys," explained Steven, speaking in the foyer of the St George Hotel, Harrogate, the morning after the results had been announced.

Steven was entered for the competition by his tutors at Askham Bryan College but had been aware of its existence since he first came into greenkeeping four years ago.

In hindsight the fact that Steven ended up working on a golf course should be of no real sur-

prise. He lived on Wortley Golf Club near Sheffield from the age of 13, where his parents were Steward and Stewardess, and the golf bug really bit him hard.

"I was a fanatic. I absolutely love golf and I always fancied working at Wortley Golf Club. Unfortunately people tended to stay for a while and jobs didn't come up very often."

To that end, once he had left school it was to become a mechanic and was soon showing himself to be an outstanding apprentice.

"The Mechanic of the Year Award went on college work and I was monitored at my placement," explained Steven, who worked at David Bentley's Subaru/Isuzu dealership in the centre of Sheffield.

"My exam results were the highest in the country," he added, in a quiet manner which betrayed not a hint of boastfulness.

On the strength of his success he was chosen to appear in a career video for the Mechanical Industry and this is still shown in schools today.

Steven worked at David Bentley's after finishing college then, for two years, was self-employed during which time he worked on the machinery at Wortley.

"It is great that both jobs, mechanics and greenkeeping are moving together and that is why I got the job at Wortley when it came along. The club saw the benefit of me being able to look



**TORO**  
**Student**  
**GREENKEEPER**  
*of the year*

*The* **TOROs**

after their machinery. All I had to do was pick up on the greenkeeping element of the job and I took to it better than I could have expected."

At Wortley Steven worked under Barry Heaney, BIGGA's 1995 National Chairman, and after a year Barry placed him at Askham Bryan College.

"I did a two year Level 2 course which I passed while I also passed my spraying exams while I was there.

"I can't get enough of greenkeeping. I watch videos. I read about it. It is more than just a job, it is part of our life," said Steven, who is a member of the Sheffield Section which has a strong winter lecture programme.

Part of Steven's prize for winning the Toro Student of the Year Award is to undertake a six week residential study course at the University of Massachusetts early next year and it is his attendance

at on this which will delay his starting Level 3.

"I'm going to pick that up next September, but I'm really looking forward to what I'll learn while in

**'Winning this award is going to give me a lot more confidence'**

America. I'm sure it will open my eyes and I'll learn how greenkeeping is progressing around the rest of the world. It may be a different climate where different methods

are used but I'll certainly learn things which I can bring back to Wortley," enthused Steven.

"Winning this award is going to give me more confidence and I believe it will open up many more opportunities for me."

The club helped Steven cope with the pressure of being in the final and the feeling that if he hadn't won he would have disappointed a lot of people..

"The club sent me a letter on the Friday before the final to say that in their eyes I was a winner for getting to the final and that took a bit of the pressure off me because I was feeling it at bit. It's true though because we were each one of eight who had got through to the final from hundreds who could have done."

One element of the competition which Steven did enjoy was the linking of the Student award with that of the Excellence in Greenkeeping Competition.

"It was great talking with some of the older guys and they gave me great support on the day. Bill Sparrow and I were both waiting for our interviews and when we got talking all my nerves went and before I realised I was in and the interview had started."

"I've always wanted to visit the States so I just couldn't believe I'd won when the announcement was made."

Steven's success was greeted by great celebrations from his club, family and friends.

"My girlfriend, Michelle, is 200% behind me and burst into tears when I told her I'd won, while my mum and dad have organised a celebration for me when I get back. I'm also happy for Barry (Heaney) because he started me off and was one of the main driving forces behind my getting on. I know that greenkeeping is his life and that he loves BIGGA," said Steven who also paid tribute to the encouragement given to him by Steven Hulme, a close friend who had been the Acting Head Greenkeeper at the club.

"I'd also like to thank Toro for sponsoring such a great competition, BIGGA for organising it so well and Wortley Golf Club for all their support."

In addition to the six week study course. Steven will also visit the Toro factories in Minneapolis and California and, if time permits attend the GCSAA Conference and Show in Anaheim, California.

The two runners-up, who will also attend the Anaheim Show are Alan Owen, of Royal Birkdale Golf Club and Myerscough College and Christopher Rawlings of Rodway Hill Golf Club and Hartury College.



**At the presentation: back row, from left, Jeff Bailey, Mark Hunter, Pete Mansfield, Gordon Child, Ken Richardson and David Ansell. Middle row: Andrew Baker, Daniel Crowley, Neil Robson. Front row: Alan Owen, Steven Nixon and Christopher Rawlings.**