

'Amazing' year

It's hard to believe that this is my final column and that my year as Chairman is coming to an end.

When people ask if I've enjoyed my year it would be very easy to play it down and say, "Yes. But it has been hard work." It is true that it has been busy at times, but I just think that I'm so lucky to have had the opportunity to do it.

Among the things I will look back on with particular affection are last year's Harrogate when I donned the red blazer for the first time, as it was the realisation of an ambition I'd held for a while, and also going to America, where I had the chance to visit Augusta National.

I've also been lucky that it has been a very positive year for BIGGA. Nobody within the Association has travelled as much as I have this year and wherever I've been I've met positive people – people who enjoy what the Association has to offer and get a great deal out of it. That's been great to see.

Also, when I've been abroad I've been able to listen to what our international colleagues think of BIGGA. They admire the won-

As I see it...

BY DEAN CLEAVER
BIGGA CHAIRMAN

derful education we offer, which everyone agrees is second to none, and they want to be part of it. That's why so many of them join our Association. We, at times, take it for granted and it is nice to listen to other countries appreciating BIGGA.

One of the first things I was involved with when I became Chairman was the formation of FEGGA and it was something I very much wanted to succeed.

Our meeting in Amsterdam in March was a milestone because we had many countries represented around the table all coping with the same problems and aiming for the same things. It was marvellous.

It has moved a lot quicker than we thought. The first AGM is at Harrogate and we already have written confirmation from the European Ecology Unit that there is a place for us at their table and

I'm delighted that I am FEGGA's nomination. It is important that we have an input in Brussels into what's said with regard to golf.

Talking about the industry as a whole there is no doubt about it that our job as greenkeepers and Course Managers is becoming increasingly difficult. The standard of golf courses has risen tremendously but people's expectations are such that they expect more and more.

Winter golf used to be a bit of fun – put a few clubs in a bag and off you'd go. Now it's not like that, it's serious stuff all year round.

It has an affect on the golf course. We always do our best to give golfers what they want, but it does create problems.

At times it is forgotten that the green stuff we look after is a living plant. The abuse it gets and the extreme conditions that we put it under mean that it is going to react in ways we don't expect and you do get bad luck.

If there is a problem on a golf course people tend to see it as a problem that the greenkeeper has created. "You must have done something wrong for that to happen."

That appears to have been what happened at Collingtree Park. It is the worst I've ever known in terms of what the radio and the papers were saying. It was just unbelievable.

The disappointing thing is that the media doesn't go to the right people to ask the questions so it gets taken out of context and blown out of proportion. We can all sympathise with Alistair Connall.

We've perhaps become the victims of our own success because for years we've wanted more say in what occurs on the golf course. We wanted more input, more responsibility. Now we are beginning to get that recognition and there are more people with total responsibility for their golf course.

However, with that comes more pressure.

At times we can all be guilty of disappearing into our shell if things are getting on top of us. When the course is A1 everybody

wants to speak to you but when the course is not so good, or there is a little bit of a problem, it can be quite a lonely job, people are less likely to talk to you. It really is amazing.

On a lighter note I had a couple of funny experiences while wearing the Red Blazer and flying to and from functions during the year. On a flight in America the air crew were wearing red jackets and one of them said to me, "We're not expecting anyone". They must have thought I was a relief pilot or something.

Then, coming back from a FEGGA meeting in Bordeaux, I was wearing my blazer under my waterproof jacket but it was just visible. A stewardess looked at me and said they should be able to make me a little more comfortable.

She phoned through to another steward and stewardess who were there to greet me when I arrived at my seat, took my bags from me, stowed them away and generally made me extremely comfortable. It was only when I read the in-flight magazine that I noticed all the staff were also in red jackets. When I took off my blazer I could see them trying to read my badge and it was then that they realised I wasn't an airline official.

Back to BIGGA business. I would like to see the job we've started with regard to the appointment of part-time employed Regional Administrators completed by the deadline of October. They are important positions and we will all get the benefit of them. The sooner that they are all in place the better.

I'd also like to see the regional management courses continue to thrive. They are there for your benefit and are subsidised and so are available to people who might not have been able to afford them otherwise.

If Sections want a course and can get the numbers to attend we will certainly put it on.

It just leaves me to thank Gay Hill Golf Club and all the members for the wonderful support throughout the year – particularly Barr Breckenridge, the Greens Chairman. The fact that I

(mis)adventures of Gordon the Greenkeeper



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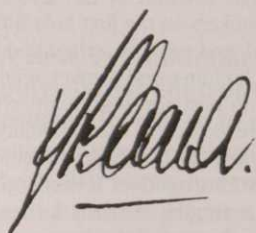


comes to an end

attended so many functions as Chairman put more pressure on my team and they have been magnificent and a great support all through my year. Thanks to Alan Rowney, Andrew Kite, Raymond Taylor, Gerard Hickman and Noel Greene.

Also, thanks to all the BIGGA staff for their support during the year.

Finally I'd like to wish Pat Murphy an enjoyable and successful year in office when he takes over from me at BTME.




A year to remember: Dean Cleaver with a table-full of souvenirs from his period in office as BIGGA Chairman

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