



It's hard to believe that 1997 sees BIGGA's 10th birthday and from the modest beginnings of a one room office within the STRI

building the Association has grown to become a respected body in the world of golf with almost 6500 members and a reputation for excellence.

Just look at the success of BTME and the Learning Experience in association with Ransomes and the Golden and Silver Key sponsorship programme which has assisted the educational development of members and funded books and videos including the latest Golf Course Ecology video which has been acclaimed by everyone who has seen it.

With the Association becoming ever stronger who knows where it will be when, in 2008 BIGGA comes of age – using current progress as a gauge – BIGGA will have even more successes under its belt.

To mark the occasion of BIGGA's 10th birthday, Walter Woods looks back at greenkeeping before the formation of the Association and charts the progress made since then – and we've uncovered some old photographs of some familiar faces looking slightly less wrinkled!



Neil Thomas at the first AGM at York Racecourse in March 1988

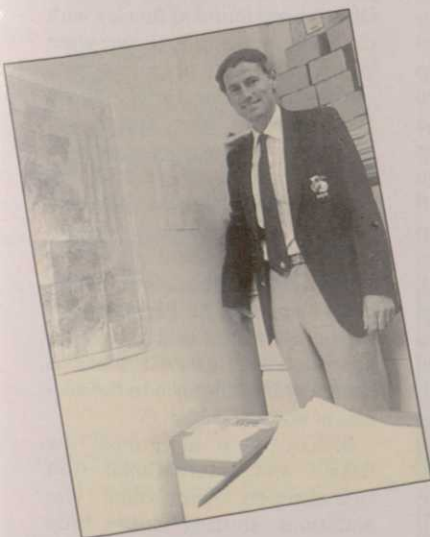


Fine weather at the first Westurf Show in May 1989



The first 10 Chairman met for a dinner during BTME 97

# Decade of progress



**THE EARLY DAYS** Where it all began. Neil Thomas in BIGGA's first office – in the STRI's building at Bingley. ■ Above, the first Board. Pictured from left, standing, Kevin Munt, George Malcolm and Bill Lawson. Seated: Jimmy Nielson, Walter Woods, Dennis Ayling, Paddy McCarron and Jimmy Kidd. Those missing from the picture are Jack McMillan, Cecil George, Ivor Scoones and Eric James. ■ Right, the first Education Conference at Queen's College, Cambridge in April 1989. Pictured from left, Jack McMillan, Paddy McCarron, David Palmer, Richard Fry, Neil Thomas, David Purdie, the speaker who also spoke at this year's Education Conference dinner, Dr Coaker, Fellow of Queen's College and Dennis Mottram.



# How far we've

**Walter Woods, BIGGA's first Chairman, reflects...**

Throughout the British Isles greenkeeping has been an integral part of golf organisation. Scotland in particular, where golf originated, always had hardworking proud men who pioneered their skills to all parts of the world where golf courses could be found.

Turf science, greenkeeping methods and golf course maintenance are all part and parcel of providing a well maintained golf course where golfers can play and enjoy the playing surfaces provided by the greenstaff using skills which have been learned from our greenkeeping predecessors. Many years ago people realised that before progress could be made some method of knowledge exchange would be necessary so, to encourage this, golf outings with seminars were organised mainly to formulate discussion.

Before and after World War II many golf courses employed the combined job of Head Greenkeeper and Professional Golfer, a very well respected job mainly to be found at the bigger golf clubs. As golf progressed and became more popular Professional Golfers formed their own association leaving the greenkeepers to form or improve their existing one. These were located through England, Ireland and Scotland all of them working well with their own identity. People worked voluntarily with dedication to promote their trade and most importantly create an image which would be respected.

The Open Championship, organised by the Royal and Ancient Golf Club, attracted Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus, Gary Player and these three golfers had a great influence in golf. This was followed by the organisation of the European Tour who featured Seve Ballesteros, Sandy Lyle and Nick Faldo. Television showed well organised golf tournaments combined with many golf courses exposed to the eye of the camera.

Golf boomed in popularity with many golf courses being constructed throughout Britain and Europe. More people than ever were playing with golfing seasons being stretched. No longer did the



**Prince Andrew opens the '93 BTME from the stage of the Royal Hall, Harrogate**



**Neil Thomas greets Viscount Whitelaw during the President's visit to the BIGGA tent during the 1990 Open at St Andrews with Elliott Small, John Millen and Harry Diamond in the background**

club open in March and close in October. Every month, every day indeed was valuable to assist the golf club in its efforts to provide facilities and the promotion of golf. Golf course maintenance along with greenkeepers came under pressure, more play meant more compaction. More television, particularly of Augusta meant more fertiliser and water, the combination of all of these meant problems would occur... and they did.

Golf clubs and greenkeepers needed help. Associations which had worked well in the past were treading water, barely preventing themselves from drowning. Following a meeting with the R&A officials, who were very supportive of all issues, it was decided to test the water with the view of having one total British green-

keepers association which would allow expansion, more organisation, a better professional image and, most importantly, a stronger output in education. How to achieve this was the problem. Each of the splintered Associations had their suspicions of each other and all of this had to be broken down. Fortunately there were enthusiastic people who could see the benefits. After many productive meetings it was decided to go ahead. The R&A provided finance to hire a reputable consultancy company to form plans on how the Association should develop starting off from a solid formation.

The whole of Britain and Ireland were analysed according to their location and membership size. These were dissected into Regions and Sections all with a flow of communication. Members could flow from section to region and then represent their region if ambitious enough. Throughout this difficult period two Trustees from the R&A sat on the board, these were Peter Wilson and Roger Robinson, both of whom were extremely well educated and without them I doubt if our decisions would have been so effective. A constitution was developed taking many months and much effort and my goodness was this tough. All regions wanted their

piece of the action and every detail had to be scrutinised and analysed like you were walking through a minefield. Finally it was decided and accepted.

During 1987 most of the early groundwork had been cultivated ready for seed. Neil Thomas was hired not for his greenkeeping knowledge but more for his business skills.

All of the meetings were held in the Station Hotel in York and I doubt if a more beautiful or historic place as York could have been selected. The first year was difficult, we were marching hard just to consolidate our position. Offices were found at Bingley with the STRI but although we were grateful they were not satisfactory.

Aldwark Manor Hotel outside York offered office space and because of its convenience for ease of travel this was accepted. During '87 Lord Whitelaw was contacted by letter and much to our delight agreed to be President of our new British Association. This acceptance along with his Parliamentary career, his ability as a golfer and appreciation of greenkeepers has been a great influence in the success of our Association.

BIGGA, as it is termed, the British and International Golf Greenkeepers Association, was ambitious, starting with a little

# come...

over a thousand members. The magazine to start us off in our communications was reasonable but unreliable and I doubt if we would have rested until it came under our own authority. The machinery exhibition was at that time talked about but we were not clear on what revenues to take as at all times there were people ready to exploit. Great care had to be taken. Greenkeepers image and dress code, with blazer and newly designed badge, was our first priority. At first this was laughed at but it soon became accepted and the more

proud members became. Barriers between Sections and Regions were broken down mainly because of greenkeeping problems and all of our worries and concerns knew no barriers.

The first Board of Management and subsequent Committee realised that if all ambitions were to be fulfilled a solid financial base would have to be made. Members subscriptions were our main source of revenue but increases were difficult simply because we had nothing to offer. The R&A still provided encouragement and financial support which allowed us to improve communications with a better, more educational, magazine. Neil Thomas made massive improvements with a business-like approach but often must have been frustrated by negative comments.

The Association improved slowly with a professional image being our objective. Many officials of authority in the golf industry considered us as a threat with the view that if we educated Greenkeepers their demands would become unacceptable. However every year some progress was, and is, made.

The magazine came under our own control providing us with additional welcome revenue. The exhibition was born at Harrogate with only a few loyal tradesmen giving support and has now grown beyond our own expectations.

Our educational system under Ken Richardson covers all aspects of Education from the lowly bunker raker right up to Course Manager status. Membership has also risen dramatically rising from 1000 members up to over 6000 and eventually more will be attracted. The demand for education is on the increase and young ambitious greenkeepers realise



Who's that with the BIGGA Greenkeeping Support Teams?



Disaster struck the Scottish team's journey to the first Iseki Competition at St Pierre when the bus broke down leaving the team stranded. Chris Kennedy, Dave Robertson, Stewart Harvey, Andy Wilson, John Geddes, Billy Whitefield, Mike McInness, Charlie White, Vince Reid, Elliott Small, Jim Gray and Arthur Williamson. Apparently the lights also failed on the journey home!



Almost a complete set of Regional Administrators from BTME '93. Roger Willars, Midland Region; Elliott Small, Scottish Region; the late Norman Exley, South East Region and Gordon Child, South West and South Wales Region. Bob Lupton, Northern Region, was unavailable for the photocall.

## WHAT PEOPLE SAY

### Pat Murphy, current Chairman:

"We didn't have a clue what BIGGA might become 10 years ago but it is beyond our wildest expectations. The progress we have made even in the last five years is unbelievable."

### Jack McMillan, 1988 Chairman:

"What has been achieved over the last ten years is remarkable and a credit to the Board of Management and staff. Greenkeeping is a lonely business and BTME is our chance to get together."

### Cecil George, First Board Member:

"BIGGA is going from strength to strength and I can only see it continuing along those lines. The next thing should be to build a championship golf course of our own."

### Ivor Scoones, 1990 Chairman:

"At the beginning, what we've achieved now would have seemed completely out of our grasp. It just shows that with dedication you can reach for the sky successfully."

### Eric James, First Board Member:

"BIGGA has advanced so rapidly and we are more professional now than we have ever been. I'm particularly pleased that our links with the GCSAA are strong as I was one of the first UK greenkeepers to visit their show."

that without the assistance of a well respected Association this cannot be achieved.

The Open Championship provides a platform for traditional British Greenkeeping to be shown all over the world. To assist the Course Manager to cover any circumstances which he might require a support team from the Association is provided, giving us the chance to show how profes-

sional we have become.

Ten years on I now see unbelievable improvements, far beyond any recognition, young men smart in their attitude, proud in their ambition, all representing their golf clubs but still all wanting to learn. This year I visited the Turf Management Exhibition at Harrogate which attracted 5,500 and must be the biggest Indoor Exhibition of its kind in Europe. In addition to this there were delegations from 17 different countries.

During the week there were also seminars, workshops and discussions organised mainly to stimulate more growth in education. On one day of that week I was lucky enough to be invited to the Association Chairman's Lunch and who was there but our own Lord Whitelaw who was still telling us to go forward and progress with confidence.



The Rest of the World and Americas teams which contested the first Hayter International Cup at West Lancashire Golf Club last September. For the record the Americas just pipped the Rest of the World in a tightly fought contest.