

It's all about keeping in touch

This letter has taken about three months to compile, but it is with great pleasure that I write to pass on my thoughts about my first year in office as the Section Secretary.

The job of Secretary is not an easy post (as some may think). You almost have to be a walking Filofax crammed with a huge bank of faces, names, places, facts and figures and an endless supply of telephone and fax numbers. Other qualities for being successful in the job are agony aunt, diplomat, liar, the ability to teleport to any part of the UK and a good drinker – the last part being by the time you get through the rest of it you need a good drink to keep you sane!

Seriously, you do need a good home life and an understanding wife as the hours needed to do this job are incredible. In the past I have been Vice and Chairman of my Section twice and until now, I did not appreciate my own Section Secretary.

Over the past year the help and encouragement I have received from different areas of the Association has been superb. From trade companies, members of BIGGA, my own golf club, Section committee, Elliott and Edna Small and the staff at Aldwark Manor. Without the help from all these areas I could not have done the job.

I have to say that I am still learning and will do for a long time to come but as they say "Things can only get better!" So please bear with me.

On a sadder note I have to say that there is still a great deal of apathy. Within our Association our members (my own specifically) still do not attend BIGGA functions whether that is golf, social or educational. Just what do we have to do to get bums on seats!

This Association that we have built is a superb club if you can look at it in this way. It is not purely for Course Managers/Head Greenkeepers or the hierarchy but for everyone employed in the fine turf industry.

The friends that I have made all over the UK through BIGGA, the great times I have had and all the ideas and knowledge that I have collected in the last 10 years are things that I would not swap for anything.

If there are people in BIGGA who do not share this point of view with me, then they are very sad individuals. You have to put a wee bit in to take a wee bit out.

And after all we are Jock Thompson's bairns.

Do not be afraid to approach the likes of Walter Woods, Jack McMillan, Jimmy Kidd, Chris Kennedy or other such big names to say hello. These guys are human and share the same problems as you.

The same goes to the Head's of BIGGA.

Honestly they do not bite, even though they wear different jackets. They are nice helpful people and are there for you the member.

Last of all, please speak to the Section Secretary. We do like to keep up with all that is going on in our Sections and who knows we might be able to help solve a problem.

Stephen Dixon

Section Secretary East of Scotland

Enthusiasm will see us through

The article by David Roy in the February issue of *Greenkeeper International* sadly echoes many similar comments I have recently heard from greenkeepers around the country.

I don't think the article overstates the case of uneducated and thoughtless golfers and I believe the comments of frustration from greenkeepers can equally apply to many Chairmen of Green. I have been involved at my own club as Chairman of Green for the last 7 years and, more recently, to give continuity, a new title of Course Consultant.

When I started I really had no idea of what I was letting myself in for. After reading the R&A discussion document "The Way Forward" I began to get some idea of the immense task ahead. I was extremely lucky to have Martin Gunn as Head Greenkeeper (now Course Manager) and we struck up an immediate rapport. I felt that a lot was wrong with the quality and health of the course but I did not know why and this is where Martin could and did help me.

The Club first brought in the STRI in 1987 but little notice was taken of their recommendations. However, since 1990 we have closely followed the advice on the management of the course by Agronomist, Jeff Perris, and Ecologist, Bob Taylor. Using the services of the STRI again gave us the opportunity of educating members and on the recommendation of the STRI we now have a Policy Document in place. This will protect the course from our boundary hedges, woodlands, traditional flower and hay meadows to the tees, fairways, bunkers and greens.

To keep members informed of work and plans for the future we have produced quarterly newsletters and also run occasional "On Course" evenings with our Agronomist and Ecologist in attendance. We also have a prominent Course Notice Board for information on a day to day basis.

However, we still receive a certain amount of criticism from ill-informed members. Sadly it appears that in every club I have visited there is this small hard core of critical members who think they know better than their own qualified greenkeeper, agronomist, ecologist, and even golf course architects. You do certainly need to become very thick skinned to

last in any job involving the golf course.

I think every golfing authority, the R&A, the Home Unions, BIGGA and STRI are agreed on "The Way Forward" for golf course management. It really is of prime importance now to convince the golfers and there are now videos, books, pamphlets – in other words lots of help available. The support is there and it is now up to all clubs to take responsibility for the education of their members into realistic golf course management.

We have found that many members now support our policies but unfortunately they are the silent majority and it is important for Greenkeepers and Club Officials to be strong enough to handle the vocal minority of ill-informed critics.

The more I have become involved in the wider issues of course management and have been lucky enough to work on the fringe of the education of golfers I am convinced that many of the problems that have developed over the last few years have been created because more and more golfers are taking holidays in Spain, Portugal and Florida. They are playing on golf courses managed in a totally different way and with different climates to their courses at home. The courses abroad are often managed in an environmentally unfriendly fashion with extreme use of water, pesticides and fertilisers and at immense cost. We need to convince golfers, and the non-golfing public, that natural and environmentally managed courses are the correct route to take and that golf on them is in fact much more fun and has certainly more variety.

These issues are not going to go away, water will become more expensive, that is if it remains available for golf courses, and many pesticides will become illegal. Other methods need to be found.

Many golfers who have taken up the game in the last 15 to 20 years have not had the opportunity of playing traditional British golf and do not appreciate the joys of playing the ball along the ground as well as in the air. Television has a lot to answer for, as many courses have tried to ape the American style of play which is never going to be successful on older designed courses with small tightly bunkered greens and with totally different climates. Golfers from all over the world flock to the British Isles to play courses such as Carnoustie, Ballyunion, Portmarnock, Royal St. Georges, Royal County Down, Sunningdale and, of course, St. Andrews and there are many other lesser known gems.

It is important that greenkeepers like David Roy do not lose their enthusiasm or become disillusioned with the unrealistic demands of what I hope is the minority of golfers. It is up to everyone in authority in the clubs to support these issues and to back "The Way Forward" for golf.

Malcolm Peake

Temple GC

Henley on Thames

Allow foxes to eradicate rabbits

In your article on rabbit control undertaken by the Middlesex based MG Wildlife you rightly refer to the conservation aspects of the work they carry out.

Rabbits are a major pest and unless the present population explosion is brought under control major damage to trees, shrubs and some meadow land plants can be expected.

The damage to greens, tees and fairways is also considerable and expensive to repair in both labour and materials.

It therefore came as a surprise to see in your article that this company which purports to control rabbits uses "silenced rifles to control animals such as foxes".

As foxes are a major predator of rabbits and other small rodents which can cause damage on a golf course it seems to me to be counter productive to shoot them unless the object of the exercise is only to promote shooting.

I feel that the eradication of rabbits which, despite the cuddly aspect of the little beast portrayed, is essential. We should encourage all predators including, and most importantly foxes.

I have for the last 40 years been responsible for the maintenance of two 18 holes and a 9 hole golf courses and would in no circumstances encourage the shooting of foxes.

I recommend to all your readers the need to eradicate rabbits wherever they are found and the encouragement of foxes.

DI Wilkinson

Hull, Yorkshire

■ Editor's Note. A spokesman for MG Wildlife said he agreed that foxes kept the rabbit population down and that they actively encouraged foxes unless they were, on the rare occasion, the only predator on the golf course.

Bad attitudes on display

I read the article on the London Golf Club's course in the April issue of *Greenkeeper International* with despair and incredulity. If it had been written on the basis that no one should try to emulate the methods adopted at the London, even in the extremely unlikely event of equalling their budgets and manpower it may have served a purpose. As it is, virtually every statement contradicts standard practices elsewhere. Criticisms of UK education are unwarranted, though certainly standards at some colleges need tightening up and this is being actively implemented.

The sad fact is that the London is an example of a tiny minority of megabuck courses, most of which have failed and most of the survivors continue as rich men's playthings or loss-making prestige symbols. It would be invidious to name the few exceptions.

As a final comment may I pass on the comment of one of my friends in the USGA who complimented British courses in having teams with largely qualified staff contrasting with American courses, where in too many cases one finds a graduate sitting behind a computer console, supported by ill-educated labourers capable of doing only their own specialised task.

J H Arthur B.Sc.(Agric)

Budleigh Salterton

East Devon

Don't knock the educators

I write to express my sincere concerns highlighted in your excellent article regarding the London Golf Club.

My concern is of criticisms levelled at NVQs and Modern Apprenticeships which are at present being introduced within our industry.

I have in the past shared with Steve Jones (Course Superintendent) the frustrations, disillusionment, despondency and even anger with the so-called system of education for Greenkeepers in this country for almost all of my 28 years in Greenkeeping.

I too have made attempts to introduce systems of training within individual Golf Clubs to compensate for the inadequacy of colleges and college lecturers.

However this approach cannot be right because: (a) We must have a standard across the whole industry as employers need to know who to employ according to what that person is capable of; and (b) An insular approach to training is extremely costly if it is to achieve acceptable results (in terms of time as well as money). I do not care how much your training budget is - an efficiently managed business cannot afford to throw time and money away.

Most of my frustrations have been allayed however since the Greenkeepers' Training Committee became involved in first NVQs and

just recently the Modern Apprenticeship Scheme.

Without going into any detail, NVQs are about standards on the golf course (not in a lecture room). The standards are set by your own industry and judged/assessed by your own industry, ie Golf Course Managers (on the golf course) who are qualified GTC trained Assessors and who are industry competent.

Modern Apprenticeships have been introduced for under 25's to provide a structure for NVQs so that progress can be monitored (using individual training for each apprentice) throughout the period of the apprenticeship and is again monitored by your own industry using industry competent Golf Course Managers as well as elected, approved training providers/centres.

Under the structure of Modern Apprenticeships the refunding of training costs is available to the employer on the Apprentice's achievement of the relevant level. The Government has had to do this to get employers to invest in training and I for one cannot miss out on money available for training. As a Course Manager I would not be doing my job properly if I ignored this fact.

I would therefore strongly urge any Course Manager or any Employer who shares the frustration of Steve Jones not to try to "go it alone". There is an excellent system in place governed by your own Authority on training - the Greenkeepers' Training Committee. Please contact them on 01347 838640. Once you know all the facts you can then make an informed decision.

Duncan McGilvray

Golf Course Manager

Letchworth Golf Club

(mis)adventures of Gordon the Greenkeeper



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No consultation?

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BIGGA membership

