

# SETTING THE STANDARDS

Walter Woods visited all six finalists as part of the judging process and came away enthused by the quality of work that he found

The Toro Award for Excellence in Greenkeeping was initially organised to raise standards of the greenkeeping profession and judging by the quality we have seen in the two years of the competition this has undoubtedly been achieved.

Last year's competition, won by Ian McMillan of Hankley Common GC, was a huge success thus ensuring that entries for this year would be increased. That was the case and it meant that changes to the judging procedure had to be made so that all entries had to go through a qualifying round before a short list of finalists was decided. This judging was carried out by a distinguished panel comprising Jimmy Nielson, Barry Heaney, Bill Lawson, Paddy McCarron, Eric James and the BIGGA Chairman, Gordon Child.

Being asked to perform the final judging for the second year running was an honour, giving me a personal insight into the improvements in standards, even from last year.

Starting off in early September I set out by car on a tour of Britain which took in the six finalist's golf courses.

I first headed for Carden Park, near Chester, to meet Course Manager, Andy Campbell, who is in charge of 45 holes of golf, including the recently-opened Jack Nicklaus course which is set in magnificent scenery.

Andy is one of the modern type of Course Manager who is setting the standards for others to follow and is already the holder of the Master Greenkeeper Award.

When walking the fairways with Andy I could detect a pride and passion for the greenkeeping profession, coupled with a great ambition for his golf course.

Leaving there I headed south, through heavy rainstorms, to meet Richard Whyman, who has been Head Greenkeeper at the delightful Bude and North Cornwall links course for the last 14 years.

When arriving at the clubhouse my first impression was one which you would see anywhere on the east of Scotland as it is a course which starts and finishes in the town.

Richard is an enthusiastic greenkeeper constantly having to compete with the weather, mainly strong winds coming straight over the Atlantic from America.

Royal Mid Surrey, in Richmond, was next on my list and a chance to meet Allan McDougall, whom I have known for many years, as he was an enthusiastic committee member of the old SIGGA regime.



Allan's golf course is one of the old traditional type which you find in the London area. Situated next to Kew Gardens, the club is now well into its second century with a colourful history involving famous professionals and tournaments. Having 36 holes it is difficult to believe that there could be a stretch of land with such perfectly maintained grass, surrounded by mature trees of every description.

Allan has continued to develop and learn over the years and now appears to thrive in the quality atmosphere which abounds at this famous golf club.

From London it was north to Woodhall Spa in Lincolnshire to meet Peter Wisbey who returned from Portugal to manage the English Golf Union National Golf Centre including the old Hotchkin course and the successful growing in of the new Donald Steel designed Bracken course.

This is a wonderful place to visit or play golf with its rugged terrain, heather, trees and abundant wildlife - an environmentalist's dream.

Peter has settled into his job over the last two years and is using his vast experience to produce high quality results.

The following day I made my way to Abbeydale Golf Club, near Sheffield, through countryside which could have come straight from an episode of Emmerdale with narrow winding roads sided by grey stone walls.

On arrival I was met by John Coleman, the Course Manager, who

has been at the club for the last six years. My first impression was of how tidy everything appeared. From the clubhouse, the perfectly maintained gardens with colourful bushes and flowers of every description and overlooking a golf course maintained to perfection.

This young man was given the opportunity to work at a very progressive golf club which knew that without bringing in a talented greenkeeper it would be unable to meet the main objectives of its mission statement to its members.

On my return to Scotland my last but not least visit was to Elmwood College where I have a personal relationship with the very progressive greenkeeping learning centre which has recently constructed a perfectly laid out 18 hole golf course which visitors can play.

The main objective, however, is to train greenkeeping students who travel from all over Europe to train and improve their greenkeeping education.

John Quinn, the Course Manager, arrived a few years ago to oversee the planning and growing-in of this delightful golf course.

Once each of the six finalists had been visited the final assessment was made, sticking strictly to the criteria laid down by BIGGA and Toro whose duties it was ensure that, as near as possible, an "apple for apple" situation could be applied. Markings of one to five applied to criteria relating to golf course conditioning; the continuing development of education; the individual's

role in the golf club coupled with his ability to manage every department of given authority dictated that only confident, progressive, ambitious individuals were selected.

At the end of October the six finalists descended on BIGGA HOUSE to complete round two which was the personal interview - conducted similar to Mastermind but probably more difficult.

Each candidate was questioned for 45 minutes on all aspects of his job. Once complete the individual was again assessed and marked on his performance before the winner could be announced.

On this occasion it was John Coleman, from Abbeydale, with only a few points separating all six contestants.

However the main objective of the competition, as I said at the start was to raise the standard of greenkeeping and management and I have no doubt that this has been achieved.

I would like to congratulate the Toro Company for their valuable contribution in making such a valuable competition within the greenkeeping profession a success.