

Walter Woods made his annual pilgrimage around the Toro finalists and found six wonderful individuals working on some wonderful and varied golf courses.

Raising the

When the R&A officially approached Tom Morris to return from Prestwick to St Andrews with the job description of Professional Golfer, Greenkeeper on the Old Course and Caddie Master his salary was £50, an enormous sum in those days.

He was also provided with an assistant, Mr Honeyman, who was armed with a barrow and shovel. With Old Tom's words echoing in his ears "More sand Honeyman, more sand". Mr Honeyman applied sand to greens and fairways.

Old Tom would not know it then but he was setting a standard which would have far reaching effects all over the world.

The next most important standard which measured improvement would be the lawn mower, invented by Edwin Budding in 1830. Gone would be the scythes and sickles and in would come the push mower and horse drawn gang mowers. Old Tom Morris, along with Honeyman, would be in their glory.

Over many years, further improvements have been made, mostly to cutting machines, but also to aeration equipment that can break up the most severely compacted surfaces.

Today's greenkeepers will have appreciated all this development but they too are constantly setting standards. Fairways on today's

Championship golf courses are sometimes better than greens were many years ago, with equally fast stimpmeter readings. Greens can be cut in a fraction of the time with precise uniformity.

In 1987 when BIGGA was inaugurated with the aim of formalising education, standards were being constantly improved. Golf Course Managers can now communicate at the highest level and their job has become a profession and they must cope with the demands placed on them by the ever increasing expansion of golf.

A few years ago an approach was made by Bob Buckingham of Toro and Graham Dale and Peter Mansfield of Lely suggesting that they would like to finance an award which would measure new standard setting related to individual golf courses and Course Manager's education.

This Award, the Toro Award for Excellence in Greenkeeping, has become an annual event with participation growing each year. For the first few years the fear factor was apparent with Course Managers reluctant to enter, thinking that they might not meet the criteria. This has now changed with the knowledge that clubs and individuals who enter are winning because by doing so they are pushing the quality levels still higher... just as Old Tom Morris did.

At the beginning of each year the entry forms are sent out and returned. The entrants are then organised into their own Regions where they can be assessed using retired, respected Course Managers who have time to visit. From these visits a short list of six finalists is selected - usually the furthest away most inaccessible courses throughout the country!

Yours truly is then sent out to visit, armed with directions honed with military precision by Education and Training Manager, Ken Richardson.

The first club to be visited was north - where men are men and sheep are nervous. Right through glens, winding through snow topped mountains, past Inverness, turning right at the Black Isle to Fortrose and Rosemarkie. Both little fishing villages have escaped through time and the golf course is on a peninsula bordered on both sides by the sea, dictating that a hook should not be a part of your golfing armoury.

This gem of a course is looked after by Stuart Hogg, who was an apprentice to Jim Paton, of West Kilbride.

Stuart is enthusiastic about his profession and always willing to learn about the combination of old techniques and modern methods. The golf club is one of the most friendly, hospitably you will meet making it no wonder why Stuart enjoys his work there.





standards

From the furthest north I headed south, past Hadrian's Wall to the historic city of Chester and Carden Park, venue for his year's BIGGA National Golf Championship. Andy Campbell, without his kilt, is the Course Manager who with each passing year is becoming more professional and showing us what can be achieved by good education. Andy is responsible for two courses, the Cheshire and the Nicklaus, designed by the great man himself. Both courses were beautifully manicured having dried out from torrential rain the previous month.

Yeovil was my next stop down the M6, past spaghetti junction through traffic jams then into this delightful course which contains 27 holes. Our Chairman, rang to inform me of the young Course Manager's ability and after meeting him I could understand why. Matt Maryon was a breath of fresh air. Young and ambitious with a large appetite for education he made me believe he could easily perform the duties of General Manager. The golf course was perfectly presented with well maintained surfaces for members and visitors to enjoy.

Brian Turner, of Sunningdale, was my next port of call giving me the opportunity to call on Chris Kennedy and family at Wentworth which had just finished with the World Matchplay and another successful year for the previous Hags Castle man.

The following day I spent with Brian walking round one of the finest and most picturesque courses in the world. The venue for many Championships, both professional and amateur over the last few years, Brian has adopted a policy of reducing NPK levels to greens of both courses. The New course has a large amount of Bent grass, some Fescue and Poa where the Old course is more dominated with Poa, owing to the large amount of traffic it receives. This policy will be difficult, requiring the support of his committee, but nevertheless if the golf club wants Championship standards it will have to be done and Brian will be the very man to do it.

Leaving Sunningdale it was north again to Fulford Heath, just south of Birmingham to meet Kim Blake, the Course Manager of this lovely parkland course which contains lakes surrounded by mature trees and flowering bushes. This course was perfectly maintained, mostly for membership and visitor play, although County fixtures were a regular owing to its delightful setting.

Kim, is a BIGGA enthusiast, encouraging his staff to participate in all educational pursuits. This is also reflected on their individual performance in their combined efforts to provide quality.

Leaving the congestion of Birmingham it was northwards on the M1, which frightens the living

daylights out of me, right to Durham and Chester-le-Street, where the locals speak funnier than I do.

The day I chose was raining cats and dogs but the sun soon shone when I met Barrie Lee, the Course Manager of this parkland course which lies under the shadow of a huge castle. Originally it had an 18-hole course on the estate then it was changed adding more holes towards the river making 18 holes and a five hole practice course. Barrie is an amazing, energetic fellow, constantly looking at ways he can improve his education which would be instantly relayed back onto his golf course.

During the finals at Aldwark Manor a long discussion took place involving the Toro management and BIGGA officials mainly about applying a fair system of marking which ensured that 50% of the marks went to golf course maintenance with the remaining percentage averaged out on the rest of the marking process to include the final interview.

As you will all be aware Brian Turner, from Sunningdale, won the Award. It could not have gone to a finer individual who was an outstanding candidate and a credit to his profession.

It is also important to thank the Toro Company for allowing BIGGA to run an award which helps to raise the standards and gives such valuable prizes.

From left to right:
1 Matt Maryon at Yeovil

2 Stephen Skachill cuts a green at Chester-le-Street

3 Fortrose and Rosemarkie

4 Fulford Heath

5 Sunningdale

6 Carden Park

