



BACK TO THE FUTURE



Above: Neil in the foyer of BIGGA HOUSE on a sunny spring day

Below: The BTME Steering Committee in session

Tomorrow to fresh woods, and pastures new ...

So I left a green and pleasant land and I invite the reader to come with me to the first Monday in the month of August 1987. That very morning, a homespun Welshman arrived at a building set in woods in a place of wild delights called Bingley, somewhere in deepest Yorkshire. It had an imposing name, the Sports Turf Research Institute, not that it meant much to this writer. The STRI had been designated as BIGGA's first 'home' and my moment of destiny had arrived - to set up, organise and administer this new body, formed after two traumatic years which had finally seen the three previous greenkeeping Associations coming together under the BIGGA umbrella.

Little time to reflect on the hills and dales I had left behind, my induction to the world of greenkeeping was to be short, sharp and severe - here's what you have, now get on with it!

What did I have? Well I had a small empty office, save for a desk and

chair. I had been told to collect £15 per head in subscription from some 1200 greenkeepers, members of the previous Associations, who might or might not, choose to join BIGGA. I was advised that a computer system, an exhibition and a magazine were required - like now! So we were off down a long and winding road which brought us to Aldwark Manor, to a portacabin, then rented offices and finally in 1998 into BIGGA HOUSE. I am not intent on an historical account of BIGGA's journey down 15 years but we must reflect briefly on our beginnings to understand and appreciate how far the Association and thereby greenkeeping, for BIGGA has most certainly enhanced the profession, have come since our unheralded beginnings in the Bingley of long ago.

Today our members have a national headquarters, an Association increasingly recognised as one of golf's leading bodies and one which is organised through five Regions and 27 Sections incorporating some 7300

members. It is a go ahead, professional organisation which does not stand still and seeks to look to the future and particularly its members' futures. So in this article it is not the past or even the present upon which I shall dwell but rather I shall look a little further down the long and winding road as our journey continues.

Securing the future ...

Let me start with BTME and Greenkeeper International magazine. These have been major factors in our growth and development. It is all too easy to be sucked into their success and become complacent. This we will not do. We are governed by market forces, supply and demand and there will never be a time when this will be otherwise. So we are intent on developing the Golf Club Show to complement the BTME while continuing to grow the latter, ensuring that it remains in tune with the times and continues to consolidate its position as the leading turf exhibition in Europe. I do hope that the Association of Golf Club Secretaries, with whom we have an excellent relationship, will join with us in establishing and promoting the Golf Club Show for a 'one stop shop' encompassing all of a golf club's needs is surely both desirable and attainable with all interested parties pulling together.

Our magazine is strongly positioned in the market place after 12 years. Times are not easy with the magazine no exception to the downturn in advertising nationally. We will fight our corner knowing how valued a publication it is for both our members and the trade. It is a quality product in design and production and I have been encouraged in recent months by the increasing comments, suggestions and constructive criticism from members as to its future content and direction. These will be taken on board and the magazine must develop in line with the profession and the game. We are intent





Above: Early spring at BIGGA HOUSE (rear view) and below: BIGGA HOUSE - imposing main entrance

on providing ever stronger editorial.

The magazine must not stay rooted in the past and comparing early issues with those of the present day, it is clear that 'Greenkeeper International' has indeed come a long way. It needs to be a standard bearer in taking BIGGA and the profession forward and we will continue to strive to that end.

Dawn of a new day ...

Within BIGGA, the future education and training of greenkeepers will remain of prime importance. More than at any time in the past decade there are serious grounds for optimism. Often in the past we have seemed to be going down a dark tunnel but now there is certainly light at the end of it. A real sense of shared responsibilities is emerging - employer and employee. BIGGA now has a presence, through Gordon Child, and a full vote on the newly constituted 'GTC Limited' - a company limited by guarantee. We have a dual presence on the GTC Technical Committee through Kerran Daly and now with our Education and Training Manager, Ken Richardson, recently invited to attend meetings. David Golding, in turn, will attend meetings of our own Education Sub-Committee. Attitudes are changing within the Unions represented on the GTC - an acceptance that all interested parties must work together. Indeed our relationships with the other golfing organisations are more cooperative and progressive than at any time in BIGGA's past.

In the longer term there must be hope of increased funding for greenkeeper training. Much remains to be done particularly with regard to the inconsistent teaching and standards at the colleges. It is unacceptable that so many golf clubs still refuse to make provision in their budgets for the training of their greenkeeping staff. Then there are those clubs that insist on their staff taking annual leave to pursue their training needs. We will



continue in seeking to eradicate such outmoded and ill advised traits. There will still be frustrations and setbacks which in many ways mirror the national concerns in the education field. However, we should not lose sight of the fact that our profession is held in high regard for its progress in the training field - many other professions remain rooted in the past and light years behind. I am confident

that the future will bring many opportunities for the discerning and committed greenkeeper to attain first class qualifications leading onto a full and satisfying career.

A need to belong ...

BIGGA is a large member organisation, currently with some 7300 members, and the second largest worldwide. Our membership benefits

are comprehensive and excellent in terms of value for money. Often they are underestimated, but when the need arises and the case proven the support for the individual is first class. I was recently looking at a Claims Report under our legal support scheme and recent payouts have seen individuals receiving sums in excess of £19000, £15000 and £13000 as well as a large number of smaller amounts. These individuals did not join BIGGA for such reasons but in times of trouble I am sure that they would not question the benefits of BIGGA membership. There is strength in numbers and BIGGA needs more members. There are still far too many greenkeepers oblivious to the benefits of membership, in some cases discouraged by their clubs from joining or even by fellow greenkeepers. This needs to change as does the view at some golf clubs that BIGGA is a 'trade union'. What a ridiculous assertion. BIGGA is and will continue to be a professional body there to support its members both in their careers and times of need. The record proves this to be the case. The challenge for the future is to tackle pockets of resistance and opposition and the result will be an ever stronger, still more effective Association.

Change is in the air ...

In 2001 BIGGA commissioned a market research survey to help us in our future planning. A number of key issues arising from this survey are now under appraisal and consideration by the Association, not least a review of our current three tier structure. Any changes in our structure need to be most carefully considered as they will fundamentally affect the way in which BIGGA operates in the future. I would urge members to take an interest in and contribute to the current discussions. There needs to be clarity of both mind and purpose to ensure that correct and effective decisions are forthcoming for the future good of the Association.

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Muddied waters ...

This article is looking ahead and where all is not well, we must be prepared to take action now.

BIGGA's members are bound by the Association's Code of Ethics. One of the tenets laid down in this code is that a member will 'refrain from encouraging or accepting considerations of any value which might be deemed an inducement to find favour for a particular party or influence decisions in relation to that party and at all times avoid any exploitation of my Association, industry or profession'. I am sometimes asked how often cases are brought to my attention which violate this code and the answer is few and far between. When the waters are muddied, those prepared to put their heads above the parapet and come forward with evidence are generally noticeable only by their absence. Let me say at once that any members proven guilty of such conduct will have no place within BIGGA or, I would hope, within greenkeeping at large.

However, it takes two to tango. BIGGA would need to examine its relationship with any company proven guilty of offering such inducements. While proof is not

forthcoming, there are certainly stronger whispers than usual at present that some companies are indulging in such inducements. Where there are undesirable practices those working within the profession and the industry must come together to stamp them out. Again where golf clubs have proven cases they will benefit both the Association and the industry in making details available. Breaching our Code of Ethics is certainly not the way to move forward.

Sadly, I find it necessary to comment on an increasingly unethical practice being adopted by a number of companies within the industry. This relates to unauthorised use of BIGGA's membership data. Both 'Greenkeeper International' and the BIGGA Golf Directory are quite specific in this regard... 'Contents may not be reprinted or otherwise reproduced without written permission'. BIGGA regards breaches of copyright as a serious issue but looking to the future essentially it wishes to work in partnership with companies rather than at arms length from those companies who choose to misuse our membership data.

In this age of computer technology, we now notice that BIGGA copyright is being 'lifted' onto websites without so much as a by your leave. I can only say that we are on the case.

All for one and one for all ...

BIGGA has always been an inclusive Association, incorporating members at all levels within the profession and appreciating that with its large membership, the needs and aspirations of its members will be diverse. There is, therefore, a place for all greenkeepers within BIGGA and this needs to be clearly stated as it is a premise that will continue in the years ahead. There are those who choose to talk of elitism within BIGGA. Nothing could be further from the truth. However, I will pass comment on this charge of elitism being applied to one category of members in particular, the Master Greenkeepers. It is both unjust and unwarranted. They are a group for whom I have much admiration. These members have earned their status through ability, experience and dedication. Significantly they put much back into both the Association and the profession and most surely will continue to do so in the future. As a group they are well respected and will have a significant role in an Association which welcomes greenkeepers of whatever designation into its ranks.

BIGGA at home ...

Since October 1998, BIGGA HOUSE has been the permanent

Right: The monthly staff meeting



headquarters base for the Association and the hub of the Association's activities. Staff are there to serve members' needs, to help realise their aspirations and to continue to strive for the greenkeeping profession to be at the forefront of the game of golf. I believe staff have a close empathy with our members to whom their knowledge and experience is made freely available. In the future, I hope that many more members will take the opportunity to visit their headquarters. With such visits invariably comes the realisation of how far BIGGA has progressed since 1987.

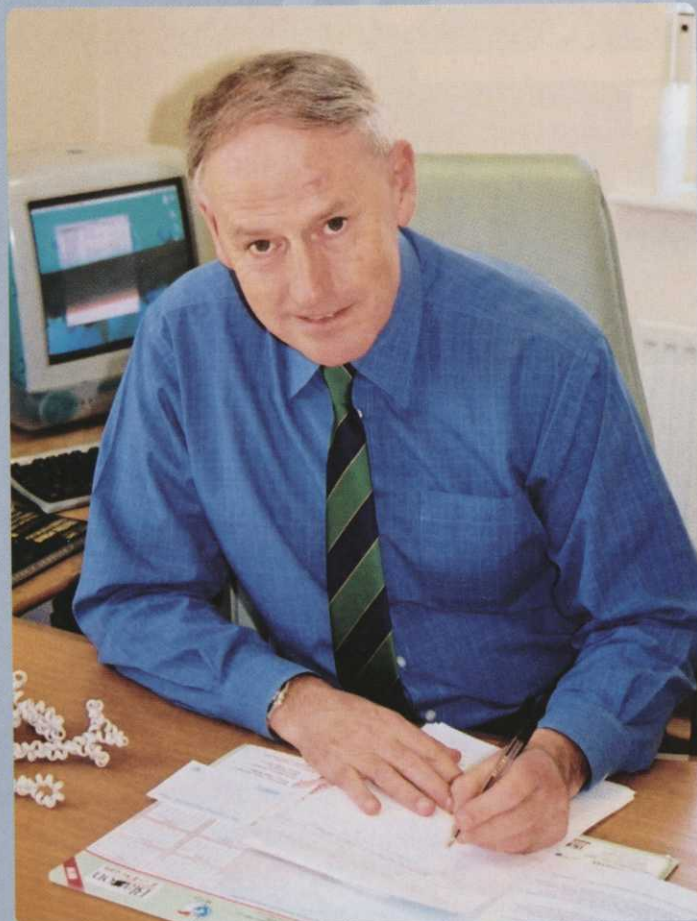
Safeguarding your future ...

Our Association does at times reflect the conservatism to be found in so many golf clubs. That is perhaps quite natural. However, as BIGGA moves ahead, it must embrace and keep pace with change.

At the end of last year, the Board of Management decided to establish the 'Futures' Sub-Committee and to invite a broad cross-section of the membership to serve on it. In early May, the first meeting of the Sub-Committee comprising 12 members including Chairman Elliott Small, will be held at BIGGA HOUSE. The Terms of Reference will include:-

- Education and Training requirements
- Employer/Manager responsibilities - education and training
- Job Analyses
- Liaison with Greenkeepers Training Committee Technical Committee
- Liaison with Standing Committee on Greenkeepers Salaries and Conditions of Employment
- Communication with the industry and the game
- Funding
- Review of BIGGA's three tier structure
- Code of Ethics/Professionalism/Status of Greenkeepers

Below: Neil - attending to business





Below: Regional Administrators' meeting



I am excited by this development and believe that the input from this Sub-Committee will considerably strengthen the Association. The Board of Management has acted with foresight in ensuring that the 'Futures' of greenkeepers and the profession are subject to the widest possible debate and consultation.

Time, like an ever rolling stream ...

Finally, I pose the question as to just why greenkeepers choose to join BIGGA. There will be a myriad of reasons. Many will say it is the wide ranging benefits of membership. The education and training available within

BIGGA will be another dominant reason. Others will say it is for the camaraderie and sense of belonging. During their time with BIGGA, there will be serious debate, key issues to be faced and vital decisions to be taken. There will be responsibilities. However, we must not take ourselves too seriously for BIGGA should also encompass fun and enjoyment, pleasure in the company of fellow greenkeepers, happy days and a sense of shared achievement and success.

Time spent with BIGGA will be transient and we must work together to ensure that the legacy for future generations of greenkeepers will be that of a strong, vibrant and progres-

sive Association fully established as one of the game's leading bodies. It will be widely respected both for its services to its members and also to the profession and game in general. We have come a considerable distance down the long and winding road but to pass on that legacy we need to continue the journey with vision, dedication and the vitality which has marked our first 15 years.

**Time present and time past,
Are both perhaps present
in time future,
And time future contained
in time past.**



Code of Ethics

This Code is established to promote and maintain the highest professional standards of service and conduct among the membership of BIGGA. Through adherence to this Code, members will gain for themselves recognition of individual integrity, responsibility and professionalism whilst enhancing generally the respect and good will for both their profession and Association.

As a member of the British and International Golf Greenkeepers Association, I accept this Code and pledge myself to:

1. Set standards of personal conduct which will enhance the stature of the profession of golf course management.
2. At all times carry out my duties and responsibilities in such a manner as to reflect favourably on the profession and Association.
3. Seek to use every opportunity to broaden my professional expertise for both self improvement and the good of the profession.
4. Follow, as a basic tenet, sound business and turf management principles in exercising the responsibilities of my post.
5. Observe the highest standards of personal integrity in my relationship with fellow greenkeepers as well as other associated individuals and at all times, as far as I am able, assist my fellow greenkeepers as required of me.
6. Pursue job advancement only where vacancies arise and not at the expense of a fellow greenkeeper and abstain from any action, comment or communication not founded on truth which is likely to harm the professional reputation or practice of another greenkeeper.
7. Give endorsements of any kind only upon satisfactory personal experiences of the item identified.
8. Refrain from encouraging or accepting considerations of any value which might be deemed an inducement to find favour for a particular party or influence decisions in relation to that party and at all times avoid any exploitation of my Association, Industry or profession.
9. Support at every opportunity the Association, its Regions and Sections in seeking to improve the public understanding and recognition of the profession of golf course management.
10. Report to the Association any evidence likely to be in violation of this Code or Ethics.