

## The Best Yet!

As a Club Manager of some 25 years standing, I have, over the years attended several Harrogate Conferences together with the Head Greenkeeper from the particular club with which I was attached. Without question, the way in which BIGGA go about presenting this annual "Golf Experience" is an example to the rest of the Industry Associations as to how to best to promote their members.

Without wishing to sound too patronising, the 2003 was the best yet and in my humble opinion provided everyone who attended with an up to date appraisal of the way in which Golf Courses are to be maintained in the 21st Century.

Having spoken to some of the speakers I would however make a request that greater emphasis is placed on attracting representatives of Club Committees in an endeavour to educate them into the finer aspects of agronomy. In so doing this will give them a greater understanding of the problems that greenkeepers encounter when going about their routine duties. This year there appeared to be an emphasis on educating the greenkeepers on how to handle their committees. If this is required then surely the committees need to hear what is being said and perhaps as a result modify their thinking and thereby create a better rapport with their greens staff.

In general I believe that most Secretary/Managers work well with their head Greenkeeper or Course Manager and as such I was disappointed at the negative way in which some speakers referred to us. I for one have always supported my staff and I would hate to think the wrong message was being sent to your members.

Well done for an excellent conference and I for one look forward to next year.

**D T Howe M Inst GCM**

## Robert "Bob" MacDougall

It is with a sad heart that I put pen to paper to write of another old, greenkeeper and friend who has passed on.

Robert MacDougall (Bob as we all knew him) died on Sunday, February 9th, aged 77. He had been struggling to recover from a heart attack for over two months.

Those of us who served with Bob on the West Section Committee of SIGGA will remember his dedication first as a Committee member and later as Chairman of the Section. He also supported and served on the Scottish Executive Committee.

He enlisted with the Palestine Police during the long drawn out troubles in Palestine 1945-1950. He then returned to greenkeeping at Clydebank & District, and after a few years took up the Head Greenkeeper's position at Douglas Park Golf Club where I know they were sorry to lose him to the more prestigious 36-hole Hilton Park Golf Club where he worked faithfully for the next 15 years, until his retirement at 65 years of age.

Bob was a man who never lost the urge to better himself or his course. I was speaking to his son, Allan, at Harrogate where he informed a small group of friends about his father's illness. I also had a word with Allan's son, Robert. He was telling me that only last summer, after being retired for over 10 years, Bob had not lost any of his enthusiasm for greenkeeping. He had Robert up to Hilton Park and was pointing out to him work he had completed and giving him instructions on what a golf course should be and what the golfers expected from a greenkeeper.

The MacDougalls are a greenkeeping family. Bob's son, Allan, is Head Greenkeeper at Royal Mid Surrey, where his grandson, Robert, also works as an Assistant.

The family can take pleasure and pride in the heritage of greenkeeping that Bob has left them. It is to our detriment as greenkeepers that the older members of our profession pass on and take their knowledge and skills, acquired over a lifetime, with them. Not so Bob MacDougall's family... his knowledge and skills are in the safe hands of his son and grandson. I do not believe that when we die everything goes out the window. I do believe there is a Heaven. That being the case there is bound to be a good golf course where there will be many old friends to meet Bob and scud a ball or two. I am also sure that the Head man up there will let Bob cut the odd green. It is the least a man can ask for who has dedicated his life to greenkeeping.

The funeral and service was held at Dalnottar Crematorium on Friday, February 14th. It shows the mark of esteem and respect that Bob MacDougall was still held in, even after 11 years of retirement, by the numbers of greenkeepers, golfers, bowlers and friends who were present. At this sad time of bereavement our thoughts are with Bob's wife, Jean, his sons Allan and Donald, and his grandchildren.

**Cecil George**

## Don't Give Up the Fight

I would like to thank those who write in support of sound traditional greenkeeping and to debate with those who seem to have given up the fight. Let me be clear - I have never impugned Neil Ballingall's skills at greenkeeping - my criticism was as much of the motivation behind St Andrews Bay as the creation of so alien a concept. Why do developers opt for architects and their advisers with little or no experience of temperate European conditions? As one example, contour drainage relying on run-off as at St Andrews Bay has never worked here - as opposed to the rock hard soils of hotter climes and the need to cope with sudden but short "cloud bursts" where run-off on impermeable soils is the only solution. Our soils are permanently wet over many winter months and surface flow is minimal, so the turf simply water logs.

The main problem arising from the contention that "new golfer" is the life blood of golf and management must become consumer focussed is that golfers, especially the less able, ought to enjoy their game and not force their views on presentation. The vast majority take no interest in course management. As is admitted, they are driven by the spectacle of Tournament golf - in other words everything must be green. They and many authorities fail to make the connection between colour, Poa annua dominance and poor playing conditions for many months on end.

I would be very interested to learn from Ian Butcher what are the "benefits" which have been imported from the US. I am not talking about triplex mowers and pop-up irrigation but even their grasses, including new bents, do not stand up to our relatively mild wet winters. (Proof, STRI trials).

As I pen this letter, two very relevant telephone calls report matters which concern the very standing and indeed employment of any greenkeeper who stands up for the standards that he has been taught and believes in. One very respected heathland Course Manager has just been made redundant but told he can apply for his old job as Head Greenkeeper, but working directly under the new Club Manager, who will be advised by a fertiliser company! The aforesaid Club Manager has been in the job perhaps a year, coming straight from being a club professional! At another well known club, long renowned for having a superb course in excellent (traditional) order, a delegation of members demanded that the course management be altered to make it greener - they "did not like the colour of fescue fairways".

Finally may I invite debate on the subject of "why chemically analyse soils?", bearing in mind that we feed the grass and not the soil. It certainly is not to formulate a fertiliser programme. Note the generally accepted (traditional) criteria that all fine grasses (bents and fescues) require is a little nitrogen never phosphates and only very occasional potash - a programme implemented as the recent R&A survey shows by over 65% of those responding. The ideal pH is the one you have got; there is no (economic) test for nitrogen; we never need phosphates; analysis will not guide you as to how much, if any, potash is needed and there is absolutely no need for so called trace elements, magnesium etc on any but pure sand greens, and I mean 100% sand. The only use for soil analysis is to check now we are succeeding in lowering soil 'fertility' levels - remembering those excellent greens which show phosphate levels at 3 p.p.m! Of course if you want Poa annua, lash on the NPK. I will be happy to debate with anyone, but the proof is there and has been for over a century!

**Jim Arthur**  
Honorary Member