

# Your Letters...

## A Lost Friend

What does one say when one loses a friend? Neil Thomas was our Executive Director and our friend. He directed our association from the hotch-potch conglomeration it was to the elevated and respected position we now hold.

He opened doors for the greenkeeper that no matter how we tried as three separate associations we could never have moved.

His educational programme alone entitles him to a place of honour in greenkeeping annals. When we look back to when he took us in hand and pulled our profession up by the boot-straps and told us we had to stand up and be counted if we were ever to become the association he envisaged. We realised that here was someone who could lead us to a place in the big expansive world of golf and make a niche for the unsung, unseen and under-estimated greenkeeper. Neil Thomas never looked back – I don't think he knew how to – BTME is the proof of that.

In the beginning of Neil's time with us we did get a push up the ladder from the R&A but only so far, the exceptional progress was made by Neil.

One could honestly say, considering he had no money, no premises, and most certainly not a lot of prospects when he took on the job, he made the transfer from rags to riches for BIGGA.

Those of us who had the privilege to work with him will remember when he got the bit between his teeth there was no holding him. His aims were high and he and he alone instilled in the early guard of Management a forward drive which still prevails.

What I have written here only scratches the surface of what Neil has done for greenkeepers. I am sure many others will elaborate on his achievements.

As I look back over the years and as we move forward, probably into realms of which we can only dream, we can always hope Neil's guiding hand will be at the wheel of our great adventure into the future.

Cecil George  
Lenzie

## A Debt of Gratitude

In 1986 the three Greenkeeping Associations, The British Golf Greenkeeping Association; The Scottish International Golf Greenkeeping Association and The English International Golf Greenkeeping Association had meetings that were hosted by the Royal and Ancient, out of which, in 1987, was formed the British and International Golf Greenkeeping Association.

I can remember attending the first Annual General Meeting, which was at Wetherby Race course, and was talking to another Greenkeeper colleague and saying to him, "Wouldn't it be a marvellous sight to see all the Greenkeepers in the Association blazer?" This appears to be the norm now at AGMs as we produce a really professional image and make a real contribution in the world of golf.

Looking back on the formation with the appointment of Neil Thomas as the Executive Director no-one would believe we have come so far in such a short time. This is down to the Board of Management and the R&A who have given their time freely for the benefit of the Greenkeepers.

Neil Thomas guided the Association from the headquarters of the STRI at Bingley and brought credibility and worldwide recognition of the Association. Casting my mind back, we now have an Association we can be proud of, with a host of benefits for the Members that can be found in your membership package.

We have a Magazine that we own, a highly successful Trade Show and the Greenkeeping Association that is profiled in the Open Championship with a Support Team and at the Volvo PGA Championship at Wentworth.

Words seem inadequate for what Neil Thomas brought to the Association. I feel we certainly owe him a debt of gratitude for making it an Association that we can be proud of. He has certainly given the Association a springboard to continue the work that he has started.

I would like to pass on my sympathies to his wife Elaine and family. They can be extremely proud of his achievements and I offer my condolences and those of the Northern Region at this sad time.

Neil had a vision from the very outset of the way he saw the Association growing in stature. From the very beginning it must have been a very daunting task, from the humble beginnings to the lasting legacy that he has left the Association. This is a great testament to a very quiet gentleman.

Ian Holoran, Northern Region Chairman

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**YOUR LETTERS ARE REQUESTED!**

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# GRADEN

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ISN'T IT TIME YOU **GRADEN'ED?**

## Your Letters...

### Missing Thanks

I have just read Greenkeeper International and the Cleveland Section notes written by Terry Charlton.

Terry missed out thanking Turfcare, of Leadgat, for providing the bus to take greenkeepers and IOG members down to Harrogate. Without this free transport for greenkeepers etc a lot of members would not be able to go.

It's not just the ride down to Harrogate, it's the breakfast Turfcare provide, the free quiz, not to mention the video.

I know there are always things to put in the Section news, but this type of thanks should not be missed – even if Mr Charlton does own Turfcare, it should still get a thank you.

Kevin Heslop, Head Greenkeeper  
Brancepeth Castle GC, Durham

### Thanks for the Opportunity

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Peter Mansfield, and his team, at Lely/TORO and John Pemberton, Acting Executive Director at BIGGA, for their support in enabling both Keith Scruton and myself to attend the GCSAA show and Conference in San Diego, as part of the TORO Student Greenkeeper of the Year Award.

I know that Keith has found the whole experience to be invaluable and it has been a whirlwind tour of study and visits while in America. I am sure he will have many stories and experiences to share with us upon his return.

The TORO Greenkeeper of The Year awards are an excellent example of strengthening links that will continue to support the development of BIGGA, the industry and education and training, which Myerscough College is keen to support and will continue to do for many years to come.

Our thanks, support and congratulations must also be extended to Andy Campbell, the new BIGGA Chairman, who worked tirelessly during the event to increase and raise the presence, not only of BIGGA, but the British Sports Turf Industry as a whole. Well done Andy!

If any Student or Greenkeeper is considering applying for this year's award, then do it without hesitating, it could be you.

Wayne Roberts, Team Leader,

Sports Turf and Mechanisation, Myerscough College



## Bernhard Delegation to San Diego

*I would like to take this opportunity to thank all involved in making this year's delegation to the GCSAA Show such a memorable experience.*

*I would like to thank Stephen Bernhard for again supporting the trip and all the Bernhard's staff, but particularly Sam and Kim, for their hard work in making the trip a success. I would also like to thank John and Sami for their support.*

*I would encourage all BIGGA members to support this annual trip. The experience is defiantly one not to miss. Finally, I would like to say a big thanks to the other nine delegates who made the trip such an enjoyable one. I hope to meet up with you all soon.*

*Peter W. Cross, Deputy Head Greenkeeper, Woolton Golf Club*

## It's not only the weather we greenkeepers are up against...

*The popular perception of the golf course greenkeeper – that of the laid back gentle countryman who is responsible for both the long and short term condition of the golf course – has changed, and not for the better.*

*Many of these individuals, who are highly qualified, are now of a frame of mind that given the opportunity to change career direction, they would gladly do so.*

*One main reason, for this can be identified – “television” is responsible for the ultra high expectations of the ordinary member summer and winter – the use of frost holes or temporary greens is seen by many as what kind of mood the greenkeepers is in rather than the conditions that prevail on the day.*

*There is also the aggression of some members who believe their opinion is unchallengeable. These bullies dominate today's committees to the extent that the committed individuals who once filled the main positions within the structure are becoming fewer and fewer resulting in “mob rule OK”.*

*Working for a committee which has very little or no continuity, can be very frustrating. All too often there are serious clashes of personalities, often caused by strong willed, misinformed, yet well-intentioned individuals, who believe they know better than the professionals – unfortunately this is sometimes true – and expect Loch Lomond standards for a fraction of the cost.*

*All too often they instigate serious mistakes and very seldom are they around to answer for them when the errors come to the surface.*

*This can only result in a downward spiral of morale and attitude that will affect all staff and which may lead to poorer performance. Ultimately it is the course that suffers.*

*What can be done to rectify the situation? The problem is too complex for individual committees to solve! I believe the governing bodies (the R&A, BIGGA and the home golf unions) need to address and stipulate the roles and thresholds of personnel who have been trained as well as those who are elected.*

*We also need direction for clubs on the changes required to their constitution to allow the business of a golf club to be run on a more professional basis.*

*How can club staff be expected to have respect for their employers if every year we have to answer to a different Captain, Vice Captain, Greens Convenor etc, who are often elected for their social standing rather than for their business credentials?*

*Indeed, in many cases the Secretary or the Club Manager has no idea of the complexity of the position. Often after two or three years, of jumping through hoops to please those who will never be pleased they vacate their position, only for a different committee to employ someone else who will again need to be replaced within a relatively short period of time.*

*So the same negative circle starts again. Allowing interested, caring man managers to remain in position longer can only improve the situation.*

*I also believe that the tiny percentage of members who are not happy, and will never be, and who cause constant major disharmony, should be invited to attend a committee meeting and asked to explain their reasoning or actions.*

*If rational explanations are not accepted and the same scenario continues, some kind of discipline should be imposed. I believe only this type of positive management can address the growing problem of dissent amongst the rank and file.*

*Strong and positively directed committees instructed by a professional administrator who consults with the relative line managers of the club to make knowledgeable and common sense decisions could achieve this.*

*In this day and age, a Golf Course Manager must be a golfer, self-motivated, trainer, scientist, agronomist, economist, diplomat, administrator, book-keeper, mechanic, communicator, environmentalist, and a good man manager with a proven track record.*

*If you put all this together with the love for his course, nature and the game, then you have a good Golf Course Manager, worthy of an employer's concern. The best wages and conditions of employment should be made available to them.*

*It is heartening that the R&A now recognises the problem and through their new Best Practice website have set about offering solutions to golf clubs who might not be operating in the most effective manner. Interested parties should check out the R&A Course Management Best Practices, website on, [www.bestcourseforgolf.org](http://www.bestcourseforgolf.org)*

*Name and Address withheld*