

Your Letters...

Alex and Co prove there is a future in Greenkeeping

The November issue of Greenkeeper International has fallen on the doormat, and for a change I haven't turned straight to the job page, I wanted to see which Course Manager, with 20 years experience, has won the Student Greenkeeper of the Year Award. It was with great pleasure that I read the article to find the winner is a 26 year old Assistant Greenkeeper and that all the finalist seemed to be under 30 and happy to be in this industry, this the same industry that is so bad, where we get no respect, badly paid and people are leaving in droves to pastures greener. I for one think it is great to see these new faces with the desire to prove themselves against the best, and to be the best in the industry. These young men and women are the future of greenkeeping, I wish them all the very best in their chosen profession and well done Alex.

The reading of the rest of the magazine was not all as cheerful though and two points in different articles stood out as being, in my opinion, wrong. The first point was in the article by Lex van de Weerd about choosing the correct grass species for a new golf project. On the whole the article was good and made interesting reading, but the point made that it required more skill to manage monoculture greens (100% creeping bent) than it did mixed species Fescue Bent greens, to me made absolutely no sense. I think the phrase better used may have been "required different skills", as I am sure managers of good quality Fescue Bent greens are just as skilled as managers on single species greens.

The second point, that I still can't believe was even printed in Greenkeeper International, the "Award winning magazine of the British and International Golf Greenkeepers Association", was made by Frank Newberry in the article

"How to apply for that ideal job". The comment in question was, "You can, and should, try applying for a job vacancy that does not exist". Not only do I think this is immoral, it actually contravenes BIGGA's own code of ethics. Number six in the code of ethics clearly states, "Members should, 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."

This is the reason I am amazed that this part of the article ever got to print, I know I wouldn't be best pleased if some one applied for my job or came for a walk round and started telling the club how things could be improved, I'm fairly sure most other greenkeepers in the country would agree with me. And finally I got to the Chairman's Column at the back of the mag, Andy Campbell may not have the literary wit of George Brown, but I think through the year Andy has written his column and added lots of good tips for dealing with people and problems that occur on many courses around the country. It has also been reassuring to know that through a very tough year, with the crazy weather, that a complex such as Carden Park can have similar problems to any other course in Britain. I also think that through his column he has communicated what the Chairman does through his year, it's plain to me that it is not just a jolly up in a red blazer. So well done Andy on your year so far and thanks for all your hard work.

Les Howkins
Cleethorpes Golf Club

Editor's Note: Frank Newberry was certainly not advocating a policy of applying for a filled position but merely highlighting a well established industry practice of expressing an interest should a vacancy ever arise.

Bob Scott - A Sad Loss to Greenkeeping

Robert Scott, Bob, as he was known to most greenkeepers, died suddenly on Saturday October 9 2004. Bob was in his 66th year, having retired only last January.

He was a greenkeeper all his working life, serving his apprenticeship at Eastwood Golf Club, Loganswell, Newton Mearns. In his youth he was brought up on a farm adjacent to the golf club. He served on a number of courses on his way to being Head Greenkeeper at Elderslie Golf Club, Renfrewshire, where he worked until his retirement.

Bob was a golfer of note among the greenkeeping fraternity in Scotland where he lifted many trophies which still bear his name. To add to his golfing honours he won the Club Championship at Elderslie twice. As time rolled along he joined the local Bowling Club where again he showed his metal, being a winner at bowls. When he retired Elderslie gave Bob Life Membership.

Bob was a very studious and deep thinking man. It is evident that he was an exceptional person and a much loved friend judging by the large amount of mourners who attended his funeral at Woodside Crematorium, Paisley, on Friday October 15.

As a mark of respect, his bowling friends lined both sides of the entrance to the Crematorium, dressed in their Bowling Club attire. Between Bowlers, Golfers, Greenkeepers and Friends, the Chapel was crammed to capacity with twice as many mourners having to stand. The Service was conducted by a gentleman from the Humanist Society who spoke of Bob's life with many anecdotes and humorous stories.

It is always a distressing time for a family when a loved one is suddenly taken from them without achieving the promised "three score and ten". Our thoughts are with Mrs Scott and her close family at their time of deep mourning.

Cecil George
BIGGA Life Member

Bob Scott - A Great Greenkeeper, A Great Bloke

I have the sad duty of having to inform you of the death of Bob Scott who was the Head Greenkeeper at Elderslie GC for 38 years. Our thoughts and condolences go out to his wife, Jeanette, sons, Ross & Tommy, and all the other members of his family.

Bob started his career in greenkeeping at Eastwood GC before moving on to Williamwood GC where he worked under John Donnelly. The training he and other members of staff received there was obviously of a high calibre as many of the assistants that worked alongside Bob went on to be Head Greenkeepers within the South side of Glasgow, names such as Dobson, McNiven & Fitzpatrick come to mind. Bob was a keen advocate of "Best Practice" greenkeeping long before names such as "IPM" and "Best Practice" were used, i.e. minimal feeding, little irrigation, sensible cutting heights and keeping a healthy living rootzone on which grass could grow quite happily. The legacy Bob and other greenkeepers of his ilk have passed on will still be practised many years from now and I am sure that is the biggest complement I could pay a man who was a great boss and mentor.

Brian Bolland
Course Manager
East Kilbride Golf Club

YOUR LETTERS ARE REQUESTED!
Send to: Scott MacCallum, Editor,
Greenkeeper International, BIGGA
HOUSE, Aldwark, Aine, York YO61
1UF, or email them to:
scott@bigga.co.uk

Thanks for the memories

What a pleasure it was to read of Scott MacCallum's sufferings, trials and tribulations as a young writer, when bones could suffer the pain of exposed springs in B & B's and the long and tiresome journeys to and from map references which only he in his thoughtful moments of bygone days can recall. On reading your editorial in the November issue of Greenkeeper International it brought back long forgotten memories of when I started greenkeeping in 1940. I won't mention the name of the club but, believe me when I say, at that time it was noted for being more than difficult to get membership no matter what status or wealth you had attained.

If your Dad, Uncle or influential friend put forward your name after a long period of waiting time and some very strict interrogation you might be considered eligible to join that select membership.

Needless to say this was a very wealthy club who chose their members from a long waiting list. If only they had been half as efficient in looking into the wages and conditions that their greenkeeping staff labored under!

There were two sheds, 'wooden' of course, one where the horse had been stabled in the not far distant past, and the other had been built to house the two Allan tractors, which were really just Ford T cars that had been adapted to suit the golf course by a firm called Pattisons, which many greenkeepers will still remember, who were at that time the main supplier of most golf course equipment.

It seemed to me as a young lad of about 15 years that everything on a golf course belonged to someone called Pattison, as the name was stamped or printed or painted on everything that greenkeepers used to maintain the course.

The club committee saw to it that anything to benefit the course was purchased without thought of expense. When it came to the greenkeepers and their welfare the blindfold was put on.

No water, except the 'burn', to make a cup of tea or wash your hands (soap and towels I won't mention, neither did the golf club committee).

Our toilets were the woods. Our Bothy consisted of some benches in the tractor shed with a dirt floor and the smell of oil and fertilisers which were stored in one corner, with more care than the greenkeeping staff got.

When I think back to those days, and the pittance for a wage (10/-per week), it gives me great pleasure to know the wages and conditions which now exist.

I had the privilege of selecting the Golf Courses of the Year in Scotland for the first few years of the Competition. What an experience, eye opener and insight into the effort in practical greenkeeping put into the presentation of the courses of those who entered the competition and their knowledge of what I was expecting.

I and many like me have had a great life in greenkeeping. All I can say now is to thank you, Scott, for kindling an old flame which was burning rather low! Keep up the editorials. "Lang may yer lum reek"

Cecil George
BIGGA Life Member

Environmental Winner Gracious in Victory

Thanks so much for your support and advice - I was absolutely staggered to have been presented with the BIGGA Golf Environment Award yesterday - I am so pleased for the team at Minchinhampton Golf Club, they really have worked so hard and considering that we only employ 10 full time outdoor staff (which includes me) to run the three golf courses, the work they put in is nothing short of miraculous at times. The time they make for the environment is very precious indeed.

I am fully aware that we still fall short in some areas, but we do at least know which areas need to be strengthened and where we need to re-focus. I think our next major project will be to move the composting project indoors, and to use that outdoor area as a reed bed to filter the machine wash-off water.

I'm already booked to give the presentation to the club members during January - so I will have to alter the lines I had prepared in praise of the winning club. My presentation at the South West Region BIGGA Seminar went really well, going last was a bit of a handicap but at least I was able to plagiarise one of Bob Taylor's famous lines in which he refers to "a subliminal feeling of wellbeing", my opening line was, "I have a subliminal feeling of blind panic", so thanks for that one! Happily, it soon passed - within a split second of starting to speak. I now have to psyche myself up for Harrogate - last year I felt like a rabbit in front of the headlights when I suddenly turned round and saw just how many people were in that room (and some of them quite famous too).

I have just received our second report under the EGU/English Nature funded English Golf Environmental Advisory Scheme and so again we are really pleased with our accreditation under that scheme. New hedgerows are going into the course shortly, and The Duchy of Cornwall Farm are coming to cut some of the wild flower areas for winter cattle feed.

The whole issue of the Environment is critically important to the future, so huge thanks to Bob Taylor and Lee Penrose and to BIGGA for their role in judging the competition, all the sponsors, and for your support.

With Best Regards

Paul Worster
Courses Manager
Minchinhampton Golf Club

Thank you for the support

I started my career at Langland Bay Golf Club on June 14 1983. I joined a small happy team led by Head Greenkeeper Ken Payne.

Ken started working for the club in 1967 as an Assistant Greenkeeper, rising to Head Greenkeeper until his retirement at Christmas 2000. I also worked closely with Mary Onions, First Assistant, also ladies club champion for many years, now retired.

My greenkeeping education was at Penoe College, where I completed phase one and two City and Guilds turf culture, plus pesticide spraying qualifications. When Mary retired I became First Assistant until September 2002, when I had to stop work due to ill health. In January 2003 I was admitted to hospital for six weeks. During this time, after various tests, I was diagnosed with the condition Syringomyelia Hinbrain Hernia.

Due to a build up of brain fluid causing pressure around the skull, a shunt valve was placed in my brain to drain excess fluid away. Due to the sudden pressure drop I now have low pressure headaches. A large cyst in the spinal cord cannot be removed because of possible paralysis.

I would like to thank Ken and Jean Payne and everyone at Langland Bay Golf Club for being supportive and understanding. Also thanks to Peter Lacey for the support and advice.

Good luck and best wishes to Jim Jenkins and all green staff at Langland.

Paul Houlton