



Greenkeepers Training Committee



A message from the Chairman of the GTC, Donald Steel

Donald Steel, the recently appointed **GTC Chairman**, tells of his respect for greenkeepers, the progress that has been made through good education, training and qualifications but also how there must be a review of the methods of collecting funds from men and woman golfers to support the work of BIGGA and the GTC as he firmly believes it is the condition of the course that is every golfer's number one priority.

One aspect of golf which has improved out of all recognition over the last 30 years has been the condition and presentation of our courses.

Tournament players expect perfection every week and usually find it. Club golfers are no different. Their awareness of what they see on television, or on their travels, means that they, too, set their sights high. What is more, they see no distinction between winter and summer, expecting a consistency that enables them to play all year.

Nothing could be better for the game but too many take it for granted. Insufficient acknowledgment is made for the reasons behind the transformation.

Much is driven by the admirable desire to give the best service but it is equally driven by the desire for knowledge; and knowledge, in this context, is based on vastly better teaching. Greenkeeping is essentially a practical pursuit and knowledge and experience stem from active involvement.

It isn't so long ago that recruits to greenkeeping tended to come from farm workers and were paid accordingly. If inclined, they learned as they went along but traditional old Head Greenkeepers were sometimes reluctant to disclose their secrets and often carried them to their graves.

Where improvement has come about is that bodies like BIGGA and GTC have broadened the net by ensuring that proper education is available to all those who want it. It is not too much to hope that one day soon qualification may be a necessity. One of the secrets of a

good teacher, whether it be golf, the tuba or cybernetics, is the ability to break down technical language into simple terms everyone can understand. Teachers have the right to expect pupils to be interested, although that may depend on how well the message is put across.

Nowadays, the art of greenkeeping belongs to a more technical world in which everything is highly mechanised. The ability to cut grass surfaces tighter and to have a machine for almost every purpose is one reason why playing conditions are so good. Aeration techniques are more varied but so, too, are those for overseeding fairways as well as greens.

The volume of work that can be carried out is another huge advantage. Irrigation systems are more advanced and drainage systems more efficient although the dangers of over-watering set alarm bells ringing.

Sustainable golf is little more than the old basic principles of greenkeeping under a different name but there is no doubt that fast running courses are more potent forces than those deadened by too much irrigation, and anything which reduces the level of maintenance budgets by legitimate means is to be welcomed.

Greenkeeping teams are much more versatile with qualified mechanics and skilled machine operators forming part of most staffs. Any construction work is now readily tackled as a pleasant variation to routine maintenance. Seminars, conferences and shows give the chance to broaden horizons and compare notes but, in many

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ways, the important message is for the users of our courses to appreciate what has been done for their benefit.

Greenkeepers work unsociable hours, on the course at 5am on summer mornings to prepare for the early starters, and on call all day during major tournaments.

In America, Superintendents are highly paid, influential figures, as well they might be. Maintenance and presentation need skill as well as responsibility for expensive equipment. They may lead a crew of 20 or more but, without the quality of the product suffering, our average greenkeeping staffs are no more than perhaps six. On the other hand, our golf has always been popular because it is affordable and nobody wants to see the game priced beyond the reach of most pockets. We wouldn't change places.

As greenkeeping becomes a more genuine career for young men and women, ambitions will only soar and that can only mean a rise in standards. It might lead to changing policies within Clubs and the abolition of anachronistic green committees.

The lines of communication with the Course Manager could then be by means of one member representing the Club's general committee or board and prepared to do a long enough stint to learn something himself. At all times, he must convince the staff they have full support.

In return should be a pledge from every golfer to contribute a small sum every year towards greenkeeper training and the wonderful playing conditions that nearly all of us experience. Many subscribe now without knowing it but methods of collection need reviewing and made more comprehensive.

We are talking pence rather than pounds, but nothing is closer to the heart of all men and women golfers than our courses and their condition; and, for once, they may be contributing to a cause from which they can see personal advantage by way of a return.



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