



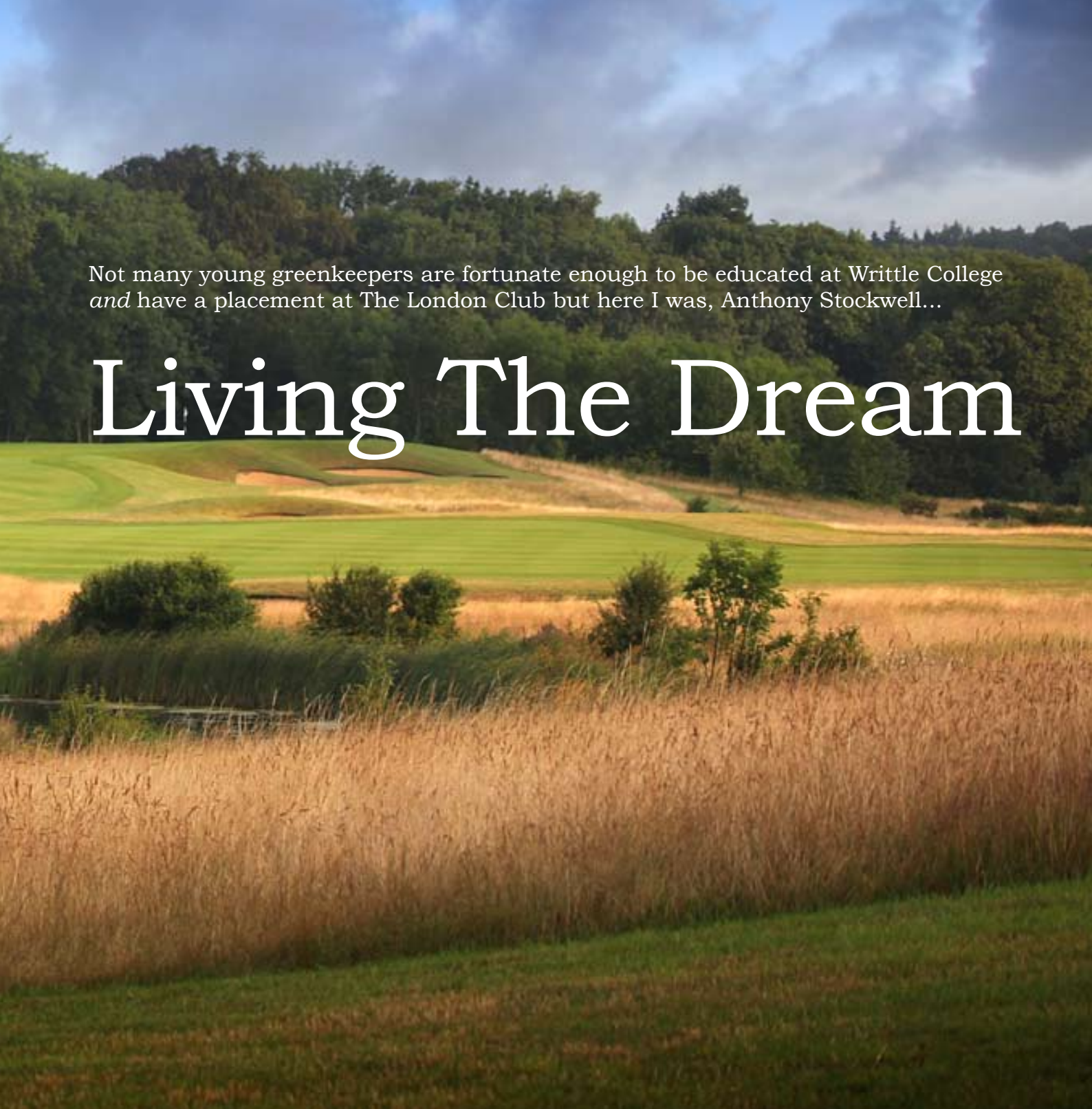
I became interested in golf at an early age and joined the junior section at Sutton Green Golf Club, just North of Guildford, in '96. I was reasonably successful as a player, eventually becoming Junior Captain, however it was clear that with a handicap of 12, I was never going to become a tournament professional!

Despite this I developed an interest in greenkeeping and course management after going to an open evening at nearby Merrist Wood College and spending a week's work experience at Wentworth. That

was it! After finishing my GCSEs and then A levels, I applied to go to Writtle College to study Sports Turf Science and Management for a BSc (Hons). I am now at the end of my third year having decided to take a fifteen month work placement at The London Club. This short article is about my time at The London Club before I return to Writtle for my final year.

I had previously worked at The New Zealand Golf Club during a summer season. New Zealand is a small but exclusive, Surrey heathland course just outside Woking and it provided me with invaluable experience of traditional greenkeeping.

When I turned up at The London for interview, it was clear to me that this was a club that was quite different to New Zealand. It was immediately apparent that here was a golf club that was looking very much to the future, while ensuring that the golfers of the present had the most perfect of locations to play. In terms of the approach to and management of greenkeeping it seemed to me to be at the cutting edge. In addition, the forward-thinking attitude and keen business ethos of The London Club suggested to me that here was a place where I just had to work. So, successful interview over, I found accommodation in nearby



Not many young greenkeepers are fortunate enough to be educated at Writtle College and have a placement at The London Club but here I was, Anthony Stockwell...

Living The Dream

Maidstone and started work in June 2008.

The timing of my placement couldn't have been better as the 2008 European Open Tournament was scheduled to take place only five weeks after my arrival and I would be launched immediately on a steep learning curve. During the build-up to the Tournament and throughout the event itself, there was a real buzz around the venue. We were live on Sky Sports in both years and in 2009 we had just under 90,000 spectators over the four days. The course not only had to satisfy the needs of a world class field contesting the tournament in

front of a knowledgeable crowd, it also had to satisfy the demands of the most discerning armchair viewers. Modern High Definition TV reveals every detail but here was a course presented at the peak of perfection.

For the 2009 European Open, I was given the responsibility of leading the greens mower team which consisted of five volunteers from other golf courses around the UK. The greens were cut at a bench height of 3.3mm and were usually cut three times a day, a double in the morning and a single cut in the evening, but consideration had to be given to the prevailing

conditions. The London Golf Club is situated at the highest elevation in Kent. It is in an exposed location and strong winds play a large factor in the cutting regime. If gusts were predicted, the greens didn't always have a second cut to avoid them playing too fast! Greens were stimped in between cuts so that a decision could be made, with 10'6" being the target speed. The weather prior to the event, in both years, was extremely dry so I was involved in a large amount of hand watering, targeting all dry spots, slopes and banks. In 2009, the weekend weather was glorious attracting record crowds. As expected, work-



ing hours for the tournaments were long so, in order to reduce travelling time, a few colleagues and I set up camp in the greenkeepers' compound for several days before and during the tournament! The golf course received overwhelming praise from the Tour, the players, and the all important media. I enjoyed myself tremendously and found the whole experience invaluable with hard work and the camaraderie of fellow workers making it a truly memorable occasion. Here I was living the dream where work seemed a pleasure!

My 15 months were divided up so that I was able to work on the International Course with Paul Kennedy and Mark Bell for eight months and also on the Heritage Course for seven months working

with Glenn Kirby and Ben Adams. I undertook a wide variety of tasks and worked on several projects including bunker renovations and tee construction. The heavy winter snow in February gave us the opportunity to thin out and rejuvenate much of the woodland and gorse plantations. One of the benefits of my experience was that I could put into practice the science and identification techniques that I had previously learnt in my first two years at college. I was often given the task of setting up the International Course and conducting disease inspection. One morning, I was asked to give a live commentary back to base over the radio on moss assessment on my way around the course. After returning to the yard, I discovered that I had been given, much to the

amusement of the other staff, the nickname Inspector Moss!

Working under the Courses Manager and current BIGGA Chairman, Peter Todd, staff are kept well informed on the latest news from the wider industry. Peter is keen on making sure the club is never stagnant and is always pressing forward and looking for sustainable improvement. His progressive statement, featured in a recent edition of GI, sums up his approach - "Chuck out your 2009 calendar now!"

Writtle College and The London Club have a firm relationship. I was able to work closely with several ex-Writtle students, including Mark Bell, who graduated from Writtle in 2004. Mark was given the responsibility of organising the

INSET: Course Manager, Peter Todd, surrounded by his European Open team.



morning set up of the Open. I found it encouraging working with Mark as he is progressing well with his career and was educated at the same institution.

As part of my course in my final year at Writtle, I need to complete a dissertation which is effectively a piece of research conducted during my placement. The subject I have chosen is a case study about the impact of our winter project work at The London according to different workers at the club. The winter projects included new tee placement and improvements to the approaches of certain greens.

The main question is to measure the effectiveness of these changes. So, in qualitative terms, I have conducted interviews with the club's greenkeeping staff and administrators, the results of which will hopefully help me determine whether the winter project work has been successful. I have found the research engaging and, from time to time, it is important to take

a step back to try to capture an overall view of how course evolution can be managed successfully. I also feel this type of basic research is vital to the continuing development of the industry.

The London Club has a strong emphasis on education and personal development. During the winter I was fortunate enough to be invited with Peter to attend a conference at The All England Lawn Tennis Club, where Eddie Seaward, MBE, gave a tour and a presentation on a year at Wimbledon. Seminars were led by Managers from Scotts and Syngenta.

I found the sessions very useful as it gave me a different perspective on how management plays a vital role in moving the industry forward.

Another source of valuable learning was the turf club which Glenn ran during the winter with the purpose of educating the green staff. Again I found the sessions interesting and everyone chipped in to ask questions.

The first of these sessions was based on the soil system. It was fascinating to observe the variety of profiles from different sections of the courses.

The constant learning on the job supplemented the theory gained in my college lectures.

Hopefully, this short article gives you a flavour of some of the things I have been doing during my 15 month placement at The London Club. As I return to the College lecture rooms and labs for my final year of study (which, given the fantastic practical experience I have had is not going to be easy), all that remains for me to do is to take this opportunity to thank Peter Todd and all the staff at The London for the very enjoyable time I have spent working with them.

It has been a pleasure to work there and I feel I have gained immeasurable experience and knowledge which will stand me in good stead for my final year at Writtle and for my future career.



ABOVE: Anthony Stockwell