



# On the Soapbox

As part of a mini series, people from the industry discuss what they have gained from attending Harrogate Week. This month, Walter Woods BEM, BIGGA's first National Chairman, looks at how it all began

**I can vividly recall the morning of the very first BTME, at Harrogate on a cold freezing January in 1989, and opening the doors, to see a long queue of people. Being our first Show no-one could be sure, on how successful it was going to be, and to see all those people, gave us the belief that we were on the right lines.**

Collectively, we had done a lot of preparation work, by going out to the BIGGA Sections and Regions, and asking the membership to support the new exhibition, and seeing the numbers that first morning, showed that our hard work had paid off.

On every occasion that I have attended Harrogate, the feeling of achievement and satisfaction, we all acquired from that very first BTME. The Board members at the time had all worked hard to make it work, but it was the staff, led by the late Neil Thomas, who really made it happen. Many people thought that we wouldn't be able to pull it off, but we proved them wrong, and we were delighted to do so.

As a Trade Show, combined with a strong education programme, had been one of our main objectives for our Association, when becoming formed in 1987. The education, and the opportunity to learn, was the attraction for our members, who could then enjoy the Trade Show, which would help to fund the efforts of the Association. It was a combination that proved to be very effective.

It was also pleasing to have had the support of the Trade. Until that first Harrogate there had been smaller shows around the country, and the feeling was that it would be much more productive, for them to attend Harrogate, and have assurance in our ability to organise a successful event. That they had that confidence in us was very gratifying, and their faith on the BIGGA board has been repaid many times over, as it has grown and grown, and become the week that it has.

The fact that it is an indoor show has always been a big plus. It helps to give everyone a feeling that they are with friends, and in those early days the café at the end of Hall B, was a great place to meet and enjoy a coffee and a chat.

Harrogate itself is such a lovely town and the town's people genuinely seem pleased to welcome visitors. A group of us used to meet for a meal in an Italian Restaurant every year, and it is those sorts of annual traditions, that make Harrogate such a great venue, and BTME such a great event.

I'd been fortunate to attend a number of the American Conventions, so I had an idea as to what was needed to produce a successful Show, and the benefits that would arrive from getting it right. Harrogate has always been a little different, as it is much friendlier and family focussed occasion, and this has been commented on by the many American Superintendents, who have visited Harrogate over the years.

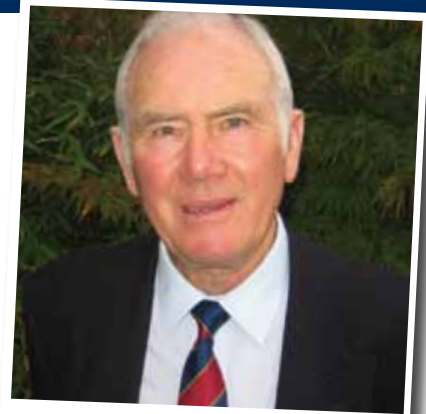
Since those early beginnings, Harrogate has become a fixture on the sports turf calendar, and thousands of green-keepers have benefited from spending some time in North Yorkshire every January.

Over the years I have never lost the feeling I had, when I attended that first Harrogate Week and it has been wonderful, to see how our own greenkeeping show has grown in size, as well as in stature, over the years.

I know so many people who attend the Show that I find my favourite spot to sit, often along with Jack McMillan, when we can talk with people for hours and hours.

I will be at Harrogate again this year, and will be on the BIGGA Stand to sign copies of my book, which was published recently.

I would urge those who have been regu-



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lars at Harrogate, to continue to do so, as the career benefits it brings are immense, while anyone who has never been before should have a good look around. You will be amazed at what you will find, and once you have been, you will make every effort to get back every year. It is hard to describe Harrogate Week, in words other than to say it is "Magical".

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The views expressed within On The Soapbox are not necessarily those of Greenkeeper International