



On the Soapbox

As a start of a mini series, people from the industry discuss what they have gained from attending Harrogate Week. This month, Jim Brown, Course Manager at Oulton Hall GC gives his thoughts



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Jim Brown

I always make sure there is time in my calendar to attend Harrogate Week. I've been to the last 18 shows in my capacity as a Head Greenkeeper or Course Manager and before that a couple more as an Assistant.

Harrogate is on my doorstep so discovering that the town hosted a management exhibition in my chosen profession was fantastic.

At one of my first shows I attended an Irrigation Workshop which was excellent.

From an educational perspective it was great, however I also made a couple of friendships on that course that I still have to this day. That is a huge part of BTME for me.

It's not only about meeting new people but it's about maintaining those relationships even if it is with people you only see once a year at Harrogate.

I've been fortunate to have worked at private members' clubs, individual proprietor clubs and large corporate groups so I've met a great many people and it's superb to be able to give them a call, ask if they are going to be at BTME and arrange to meet up with them.

We are very lucky in this industry that we can call upon the experience and knowledge of others whenever we need help.

That camaraderie comes from being a member of BIGGA and the excellent Bulletin Boards on the Website but also from attending BTME.

Whilst the education programme is excellent, in recent years, the Laurence Pithie's, Jim McKenzie's and Greg Evans's of this world have demonstrated a willingness to talk about their experiences and share information.

I am aware that they also talk at Section and Regional events, but to have the opportunity to listen and learn from these guys, and all under one roof is perfect. And to top all that in most cases it is free of charge.

There is even the opportunity to bump into these people later in the day and continue the conversation.

I don't believe there is any aloofness or a hierarchy in this industry and we can all share similar experiences whether you are delivering a Ryder Cup or a Club Captain's Day – along with the BIGGA message forums and, of course, BTME, the opportunities to gain valuable first hand advice is well worth the subscription alone.

It is always a great place to catch up with equipment innovations that come into the industry, and in the early years it was

fantastic to see the aeration equipment and dedicated mowers that were coming on stream. At the time it was all the things that you would have loved to have had but couldn't – now everyone owns and uses the equipment.

Times have changed. As part of my responsibilities I manage the suppliers for the De Vere Group and I arrange to meet up with those who have shown an interest in presenting to the Group.

I usually spend half an hour over coffee, chatting through the proposals prior to them making their pitches in March.

I have done this at BTME over the last couple of years and it is perfect for me because everyone is there and under one roof and from a process point of view, it is incredibly fair.

Going back 10 to 15 years Head Greenkeepers were encouraged by the trade representatives to place annual orders whilst visiting their respective stands.

The emphasis has shifted a little over the years, but you can still do business at the show, some times in a different fashion.

Living fairly close by I used to travel to the Show daily but latterly I've been staying

over in the town because it has given me the opportunity to spend more time with people later into the evening.

I was lucky enough to be invited to the Bernhard Reception last year and when I walked into that little pub it was like a Greenkeeping Who's Who. I'm certain you don't get those sorts of opportunities anywhere outside of Harrogate. If I could say one thing to anyone thinking of going to Harrogate next year it would be to do so, but take some personal responsibility to ensure that you get as much out of your visit as you possibly can.

The show is large so planning your visit is important, whether it be seminars, the exhibition or meeting up with old friends.

If you are going to truly benefit from visiting BTME, plan ahead.

Being a relative local and knowing Harrogate as I do, I can also say that with traffic restrictions getting tighter and tighter in the town, BIGGA's Park and Ride service means it has never been easier to get in and out of the show.

I've already pre-booked my ticket and I'm looking forward to Harrogate Week 2012 already.

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